THE MAXX

MAXXimized

Sam Kieth • William Messner-Loebs

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Sam Kieth
William Messner-Loebs

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and
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Ever wondered what they mean when they say CDs are remastered?

Me too. No idea. But I do know what it means for this edition of *The Maxx*. First of all, we went back to all the original art, Jim Sinclair and I carefully rescanning each page, and at a much higher resolution—which should particularly pay off when we do the Artist's Editions, down the road.

But even in the single issues, I decided recoloring was worth it. Of course, we all agree… Godfather of colorists Steve Oliff is a renowned and legendary master of the form. So, you may ask, why recolor *Maxx* at all? Good point. But to be fair to Steve, many *Maxx* issues were delivered so late to him that he and his crew were often forced to finish an issue over a single weekend. It's my fault I didn't correct details, that I didn't take the time to communicate more to him—monthly comics are often finished under crazy deadlines. Plus, I was drawing *The Maxx* comic three days a week and soon started flying down to L.A. to help on the MTV animated series two days a week. It's all a blur now… it's a miracle the sucker came out at all!

So, fast-forward. IDW comes to the rescue, with the help of top-notch colorist Ronda Pattison. We sat down and went over each page in ways I couldn't seem to muster in the past. Seeing old pages for me is a mixed bag. Sorta like having lunch with your ex-wife. Only imagine doing it 25 times and more. Regrets, flaws, all the usual Sam reactions to old work. But that's my own damage, which shouldn't concern you. All you need to know is: what's different about this version of *The Maxx*?

Outside of careful rescanning and recoloring from beefier files, I won't be messing with the core story. Not that it's perfect, but we all see what happens when a film gets a "director's cut," or big-budget movies get added computer-generated FX to make it "better," which usually shows us all it wasn't broken in the first place. Grant me the indulgence of improved scans and tweaked colors… but otherwise… just kick back and enjoy. Trust me, I am sure you will have more pleasant nostalgic memories of it than I will. I hate everything I do. Of course, there is a difference… A: I am often WRONG… and B: Doesn't matter what I think. It's the fans who decide what works and what doesn't. If you guys n' gals didn't keep buying it in the first place, it would have been canceled by issue 2. No cartoon, or any of that other crap.

But don't listen to me. I typically try to surround myself with much smarter folks than me. So if I succeed at all, it's in *spite* of myself. That's what "Remastered" means. It's improved… in *spite* of the goofy-assed creator, who's mostly tried to respect the original material.

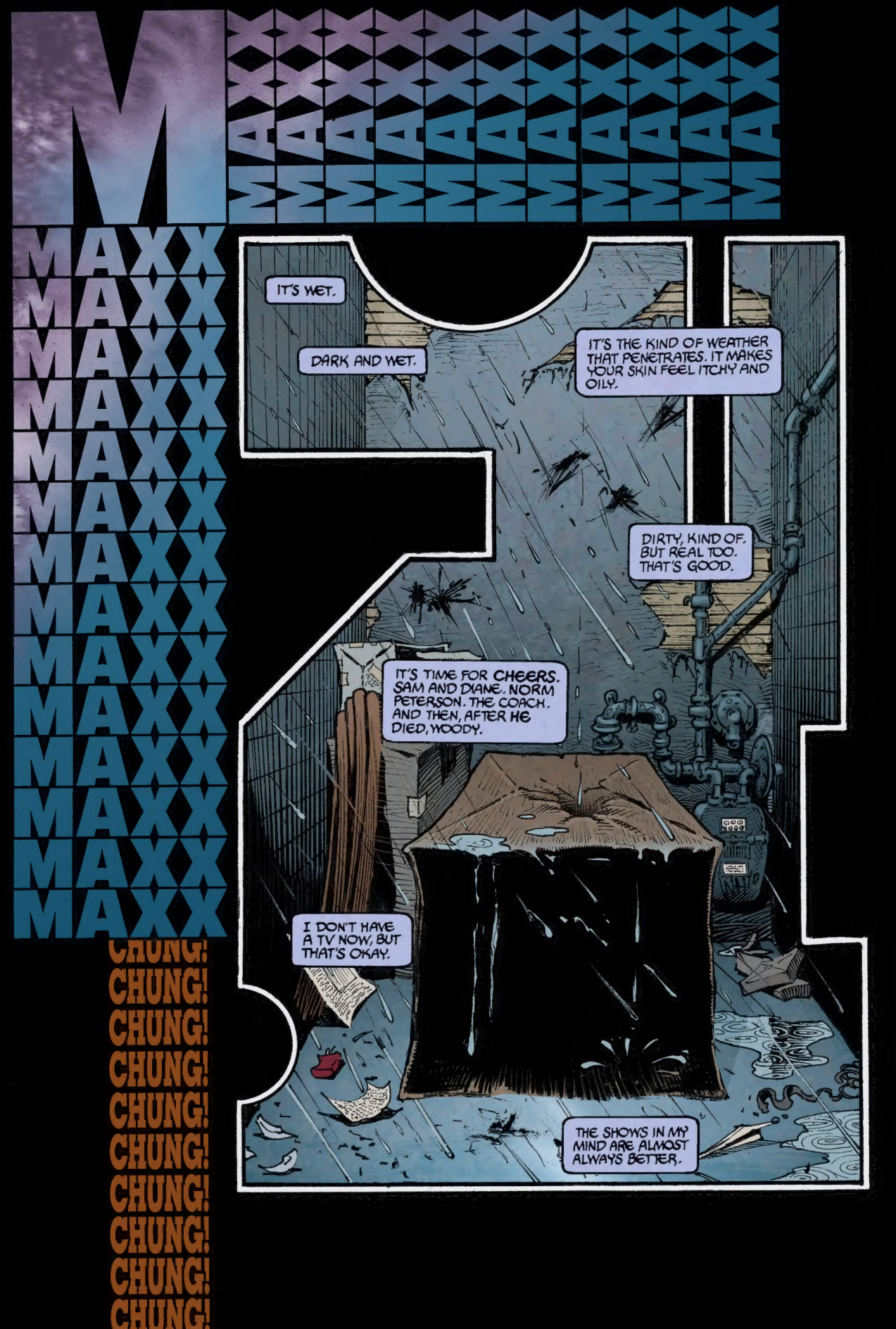
It's quirky. Flawed. Psychedelic. And just plain… WEIRD. And, warts and all, it's a picture of who I was at the time.

Only on slightly better paper.

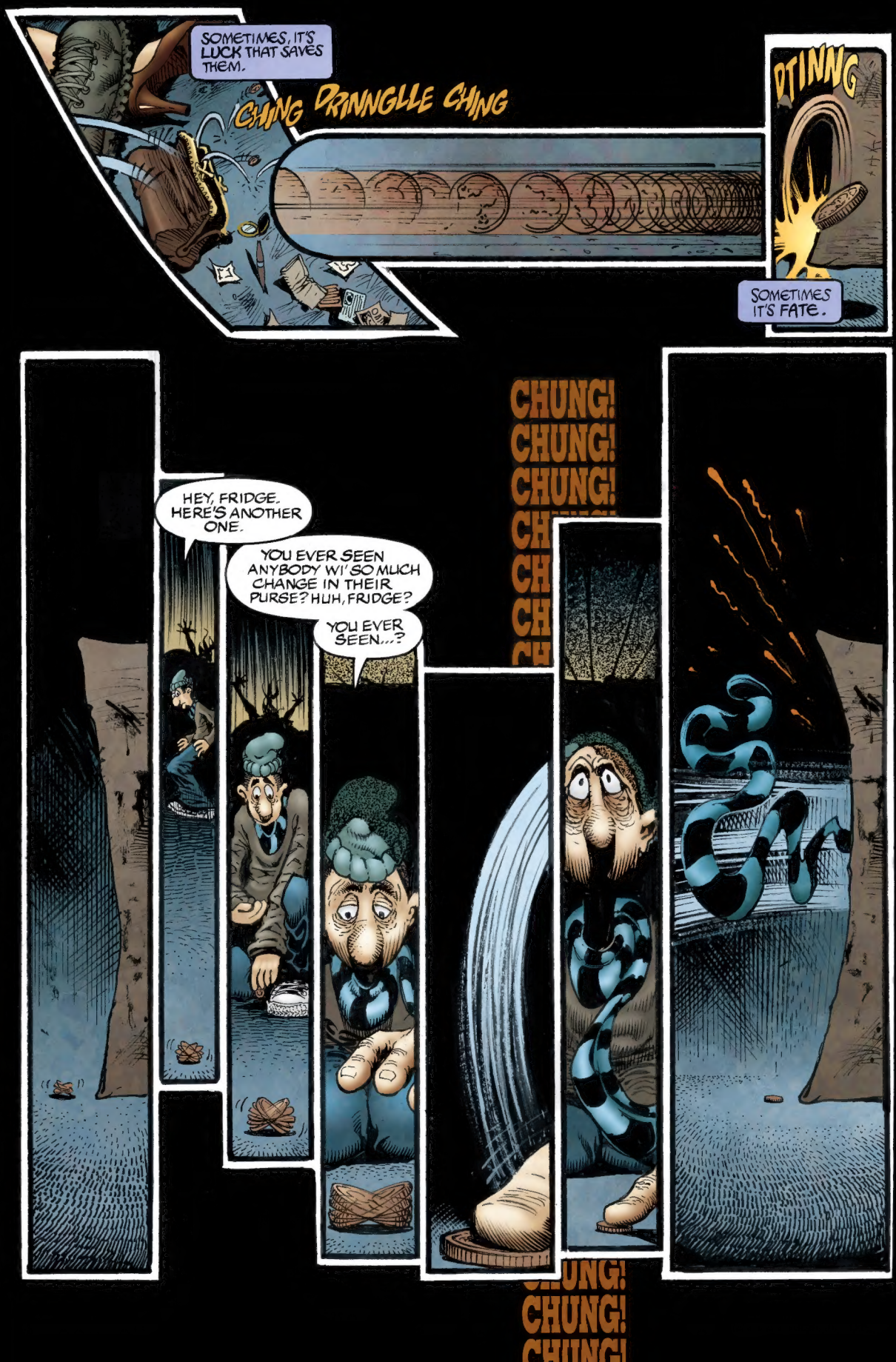
-Sam Kieth
September 11, 2013

Chapter One

CHUNG!


MAXX
IT'S WET.
DARK AND WET.
IT'S THE KIND OF WEATHER THAT PENETRATES. IT MAKES YOUR SKIN FEEL ITCHY AND OILY.
DIRTY, KIND OF. BUT REAL TOO. THAT'S GOOD.
IT'S TIME FOR CHEERS. SAM AND DIANE. NORM PETERSON. THE COACH. AND THEN, AFTER HE DIED, WOODY.
I DON'T HAVE A TV NOW, BUT THAT'S OKAY.
THE SHOWS IN MY MIND ARE ALMOST ALWAYS BETTER.
CHUNG!

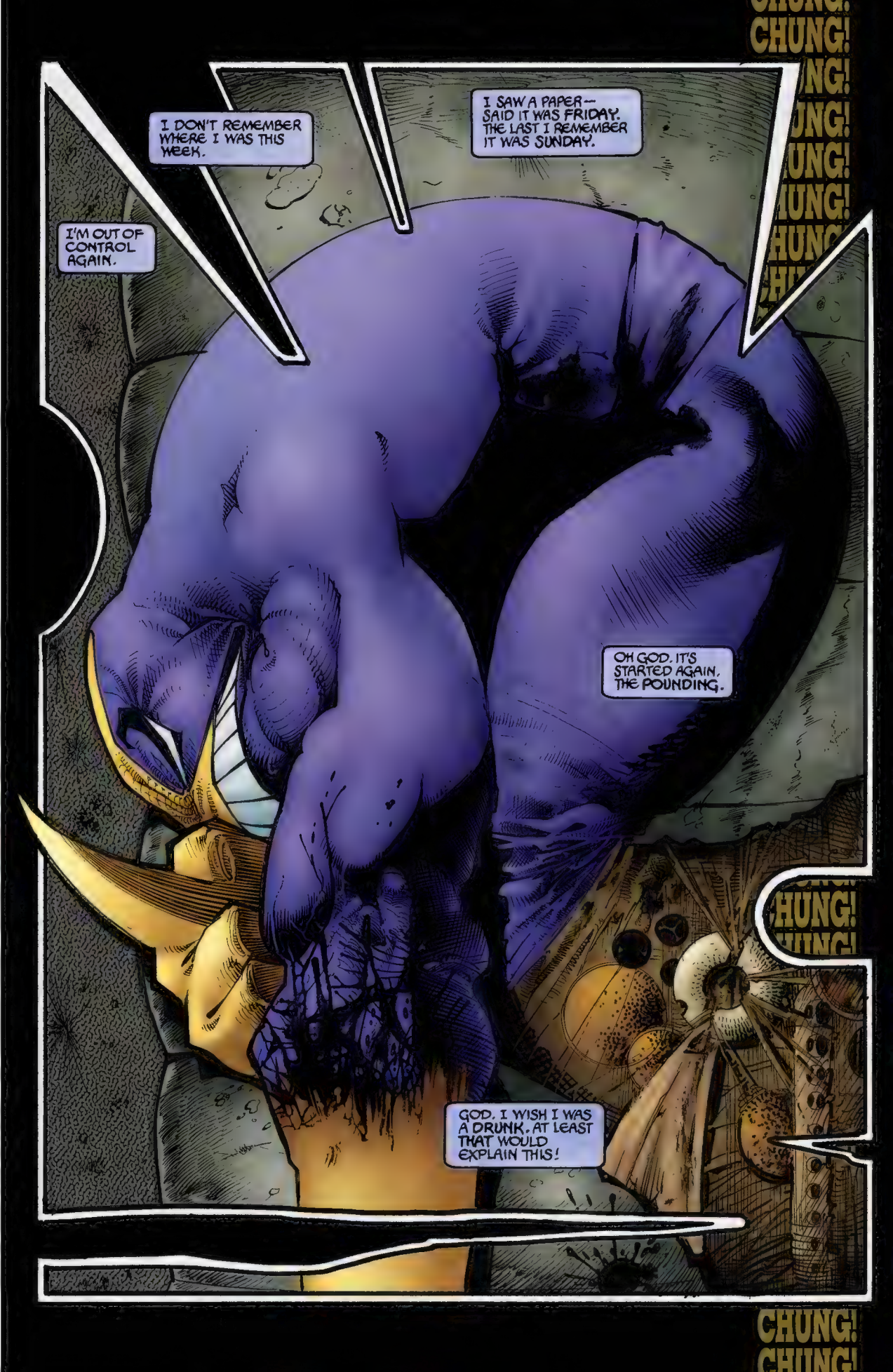
THE THEATER CROWD'S JUST ARRIVING.
LOOKIT.
YEAH. RENNY DELIVERS, DON'T HE?
IDIOT. DOESN'T EVEN KNOW HIS OWN STUPID BUSINESS.
THE SKINNY ONE'S TEEGO. THE BIG ONE'S FRIDGE.
THEY BEAT PEOPLE UP. TAKE THEIR MONEY. KILL THEM SOMETIMES.
THE CAB DRIVER GETS A THIRD.
I'M GOING TO MISS THE CURTAIN. IF HE DOESN'T KNOW THE CITY, I DON'T SEE HOW HE CAN GET A LICENSE!
THIS ISN'T THE JOLSON! WE'RE THREE BLOCKS...
OH, CRAP! NEVER MIND! I'LL WALK!
ONE WOMAN, THEY BEAT HER HEAD SO HARD AGAINST THE SIDEWALK, THEY CRACKED THE CONCRETE.
ANOTHER GOT AWAY BY RUNNING THREE BLOCKS ON A BROKEN FOOT.
SOMETIMES, THAT'S THE ONLY WAY PEOPLE GET SAVED. SUICIDAL BRAVERY.

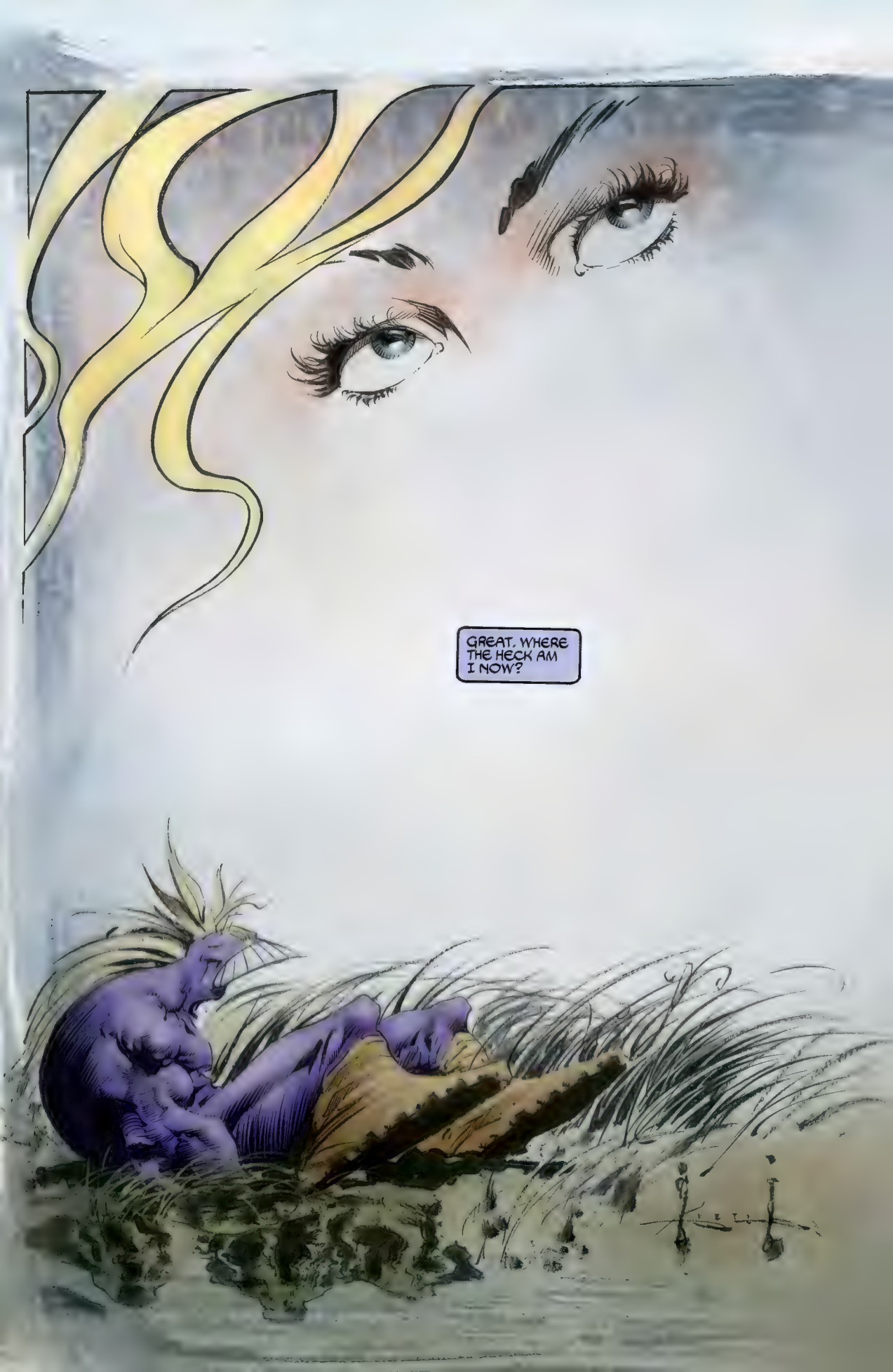

SOMETIMES, IT'S LUCK THAT SAVES THEM.
CHING DRINNGLLE CHING
DTINNG
SOMETIMES IT'S FATE.
CHUNG! CHUNG! CHUNG!
HEY, FRIDGE. HERE'S ANOTHER ONE.
YOU EVER SEEN ANYBODY WI' SO MUCH CHANGE IN THEIR PURSE? HUH, FRIDGE?
YOU EVER SEEN...?
CHUNG! CHUNG! CHUNG!

WHA... WHO ARE YOU...?
HEY...! NO... NO!
AAEEEH!
YEAH. USUALLY, IT'S FATE...
Ichreckk
BUT, SOMETIMES, IT'S ME.

AND SOMETIMES IT'S US!
DAMN, I WAS TALKING OUT LOUD AGAIN.
OKAY, EVERYBODY FREEZE!
OH, GOD! FINALLY THE COPS! IS MY PURSE AROUND HERE SOMEPLACE?
THE POLICE ARE GONE.
THAT BUM IN THE MASK WAS TRYING TO HELP ME.
D'YOU THINK I SHOULD GIVE HIM SOME MONEY?
AFTER ALL, I COULD'VE BEEN RAPED AND MURDERED.
HEY, YOU'RE NOT...
NO. I'M NOT.
SAY, TODD. D'YOU REMEMBER A WOMAN BACK THERE...?

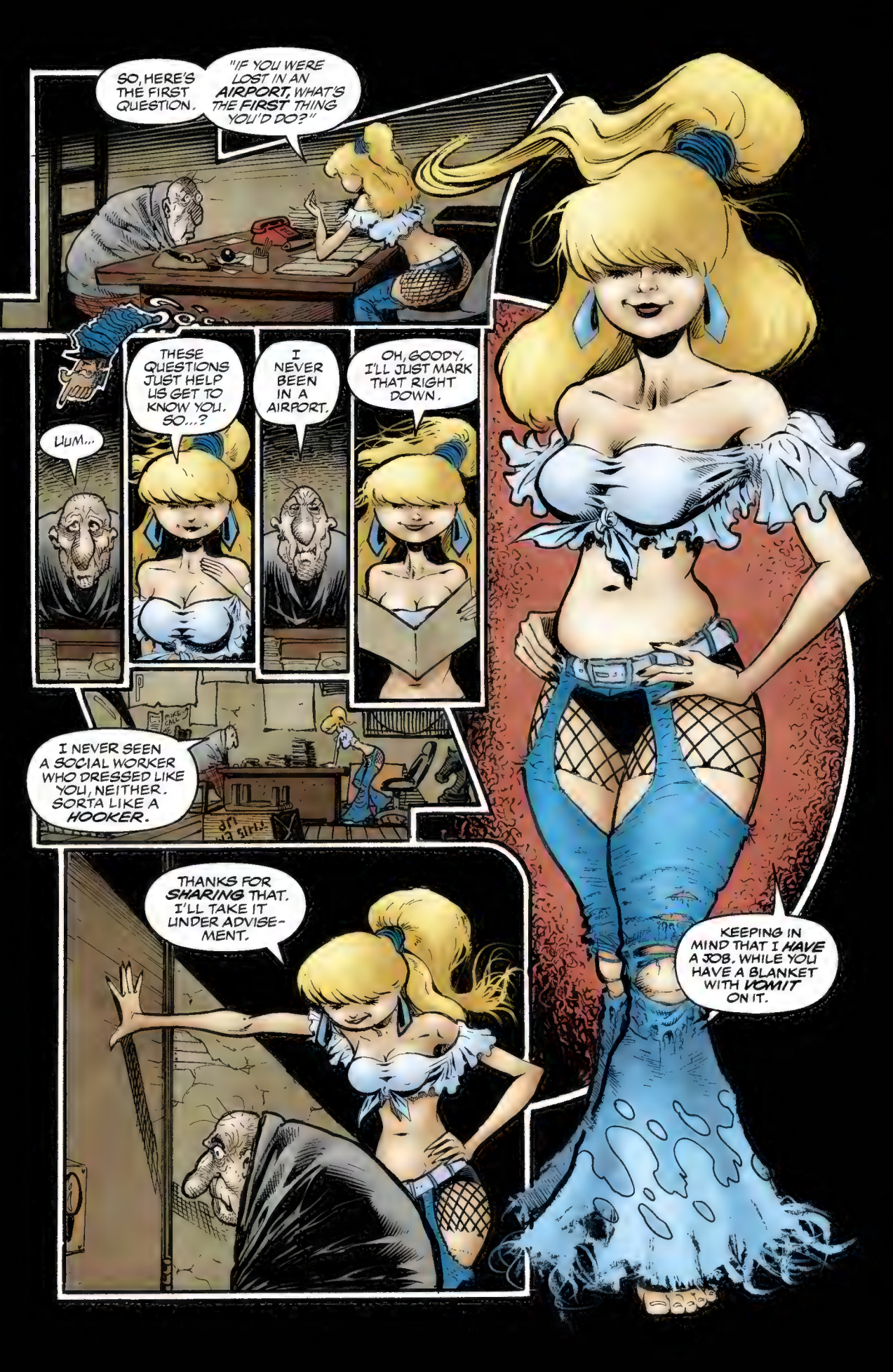
CHU!
NAH, IF THERE WAS A VICTIM OR SOMETHIN', WE'D'VE SEEN HER.
I GUESS, WHAT'LL WE DO WITH LAUGHING BOY?
LET'S DROP HIM AT COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH.
COUNTY'S FULL.
HOW 'BOUT ST. JUDE'S PSYCHIATRIC?
THEY DON'T HAVE ANY ROOM EITHER.
WELL, WE GOTTA DROP HIM SOMEWHERE. HE ONLY THREATENED FRIDGE.
YEAH, I ALMOST ENVY HIM.
REALLY? WHY'S THAT?
'CAUSE THE WORLD'S AWFUL. IT MUST BE GREAT T'DO ANY-THING YOU WANT AN' HAVE OTHER PEOPLE CLEAN UP YOUR MESS.
YEAH, LIKE US.
HUNG! HUNG!
WUMP
I HATE THIS.
CHUNG! CHUNG!


I DON'T REMEMBER WHERE I WAS THIS WEEK.
I SAW A PAPER— SAID IT WAS FRIDAY. THE LAST I REMEMBER IT WAS SUNDAY.
I'M OUT OF CONTROL AGAIN.
OH GOD. IT'S STARTED AGAIN. THE POUNDING.
GOD. I WISH I WAS A DRUNK. AT LEAST THAT WOULD EXPLAIN THIS!
CHUNG!
CHUNG!

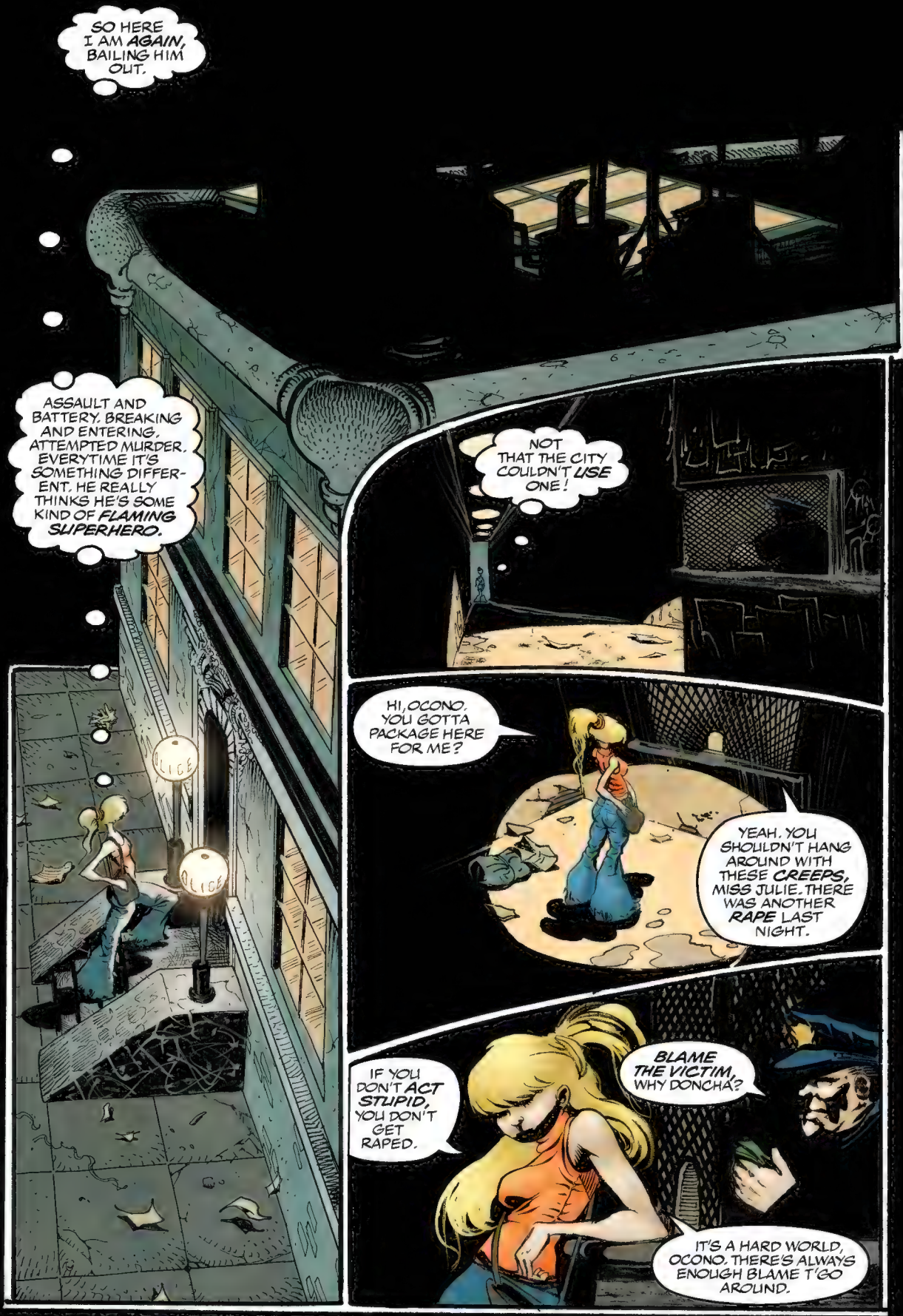

GREAT. WHERE THE HECK AM I NOW?

SO NOW WHAT?
WHAT THE HECK... LITTLE HANDS?
WHY ARE THESE HANDS SPROUTING AROUND ME?
EACH IS AS STRONG AS A MAN...
HUNGRY AS DEATH...
THEY WILL DRAG A MAN DOWN TO NOTHINGNESS...
TO OBLIVION!

STARTING TO FADE... IT'S STARTING TO COME BACK TO ME NOW... BACK TO AUSTRALIA.
NO, THE REAL AUSTRALIA. THE SMOKING CAVES. THE GODS WHO EAT MOUNTAINS, THE FLYING DRAGONS, THE RIVERS OF GOLD. THE LEOPARD QUEEN.
TAUNTING ME... ALMOST AN ENEMY... BEAUTIFUL AND FERAL AS THE GREAT BEASTS SHE RUNS WITH, STILL SHE INSPIRES ME...
NOT THE AUSTRALIA THEY TEACH YOU ABOUT... MELBOURNE, SYDNEY, THE OUTBACK...
FOR HER I CAN BE...
...A HERO!

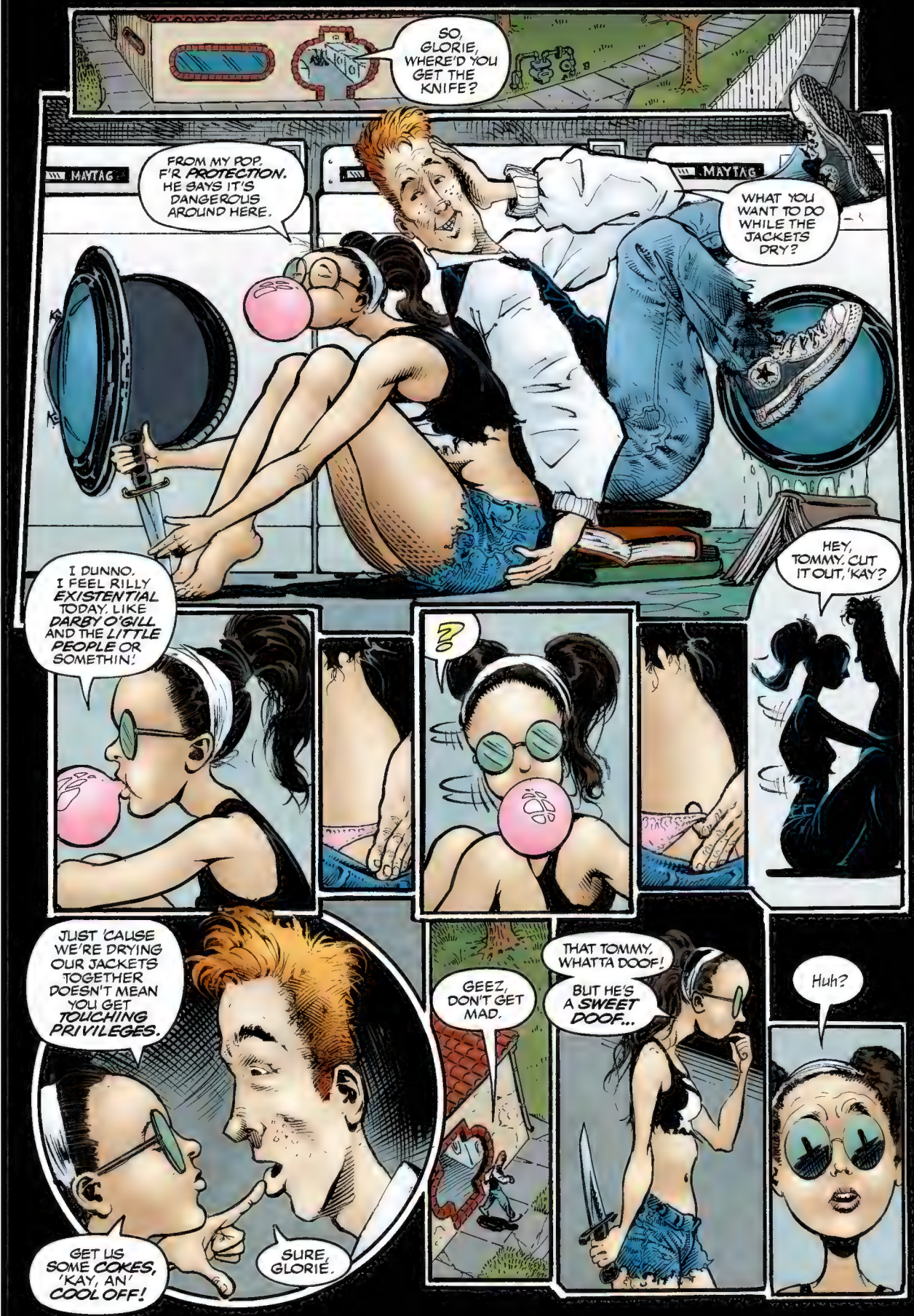

SO, HERE'S THE FIRST QUESTION.
"IF YOU WERE LOST IN AN AIRPORT, WHAT'S THE FIRST THING YOU'D DO?"
UUM...
THESE QUESTIONS JUST HELP US GET TO KNOW YOU. SO...?
I NEVER BEEN IN A AIRPORT.
OH, GOODY. I'LL JUST MARK THAT RIGHT DOWN.
I NEVER SEEN A SOCIAL WORKER WHO DRESSED LIKE YOU, NEITHER. SORTA LIKE A HOOKER.
THANKS FOR SHARING THAT. I'LL TAKE IT UNDER ADVISE-MENT.
KEEPING IN MIND THAT I HAVE A JOB, WHILE YOU HAVE A BLANKET WITH VOMIT ON IT.

RRRIINNGGG
HELLO, CITY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES.
I DID IT FOR YOU, JULIE. THE PAIN... THE SEX... IT WAS ALL FOR YOU...
BANG!
PHONE CREEPS!
RRIN
NOT AGAIN...!
LISTEN, FILTH...
OH, HELLO, SGT. OCONO.
YOU'VE GOT HIM AGAIN?
HOLD ON TO HIM, I'LL BE RIGHT DOWN.
YES, I KNOW HE GIVES YOU A LOT OF TROUBLE...
I KNOW YOU DON'T GET PAID NEARLY ENOUGH...
I'LL BRING THE USUAL. BYE.
:sigh: IF IT WEREN'T FOR THE GRAFT, CORRUPTION, AND VIOLENCE, THIS CITY WOULDN'T BE ANY FUN AT ALL.

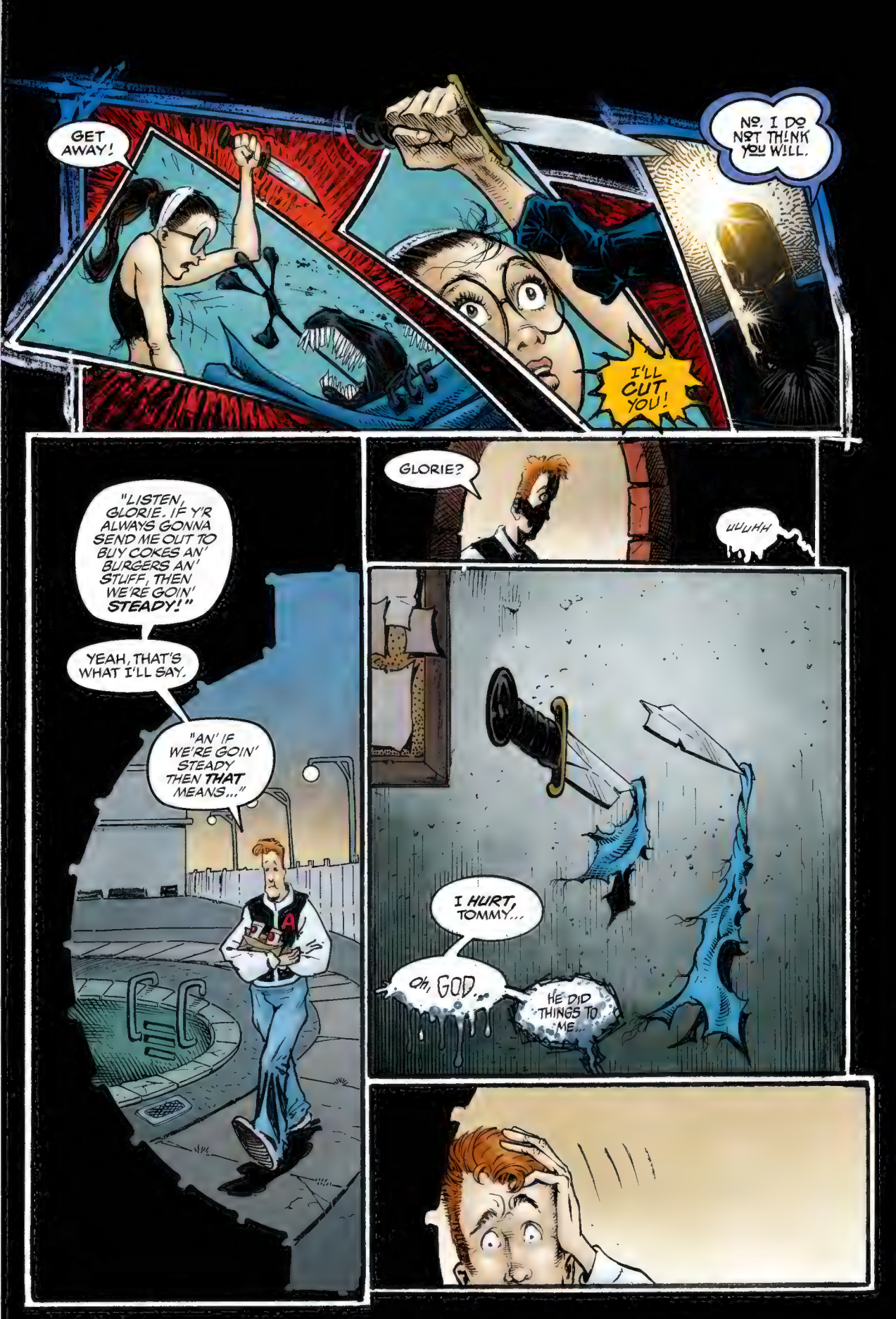

SO HERE I AM AGAIN, BAILING HIM OUT.
ASSAULT AND BATTERY. BREAKING AND ENTERING, ATTEMPTED MURDER. EVERYTIME IT'S SOMETHING DIFFERENT. HE REALLY THINKS HE'S SOME KIND OF FLAMING SUPERHERO.
NOT THAT THE CITY COULDN'T USE ONE!
HI, OCONO. YOU GOTTA PACKAGE HERE FOR ME?
YEAH. YOU SHOULDN'T HANG AROUND WITH THESE CREEPS, MISS JULIE. THERE WAS ANOTHER RAPE LAST NIGHT.
IF YOU DON'T ACT STUPID, YOU DON'T GET RAPED.
BLAME THE VICTIM, WHY DONCHA?
IT'S A HARD WORLD, OCONO. THERE'S ALWAYS ENOUGH BLAME T'GO AROUND.

HEY, MAXX.
IT'S GETTING HARDER AND HARDER TO BUY YOU OUTTA HERE. YOU ALMOST BIT OFF BAKER'S FINGER THIS TIME.
I DIDN'T DO IT.
WELL, HE JUST GOT TWELVE STITCHES TO HOLD HIS HAND TOGETHER.
IF IT WASN'T YOU, THEN WHO DID IT?
IT WAS THE MASK.
RIGHT.
I WARNED KIM NOT TO GET TOO CLOSE.
LET'S JUST DROP IT, OKAY?
YOU NEED SOME NEW CLOTHES, SOME FOOD AND A HOT BATH.
OKAY. BUT NO BUBBLES THIS TIME.

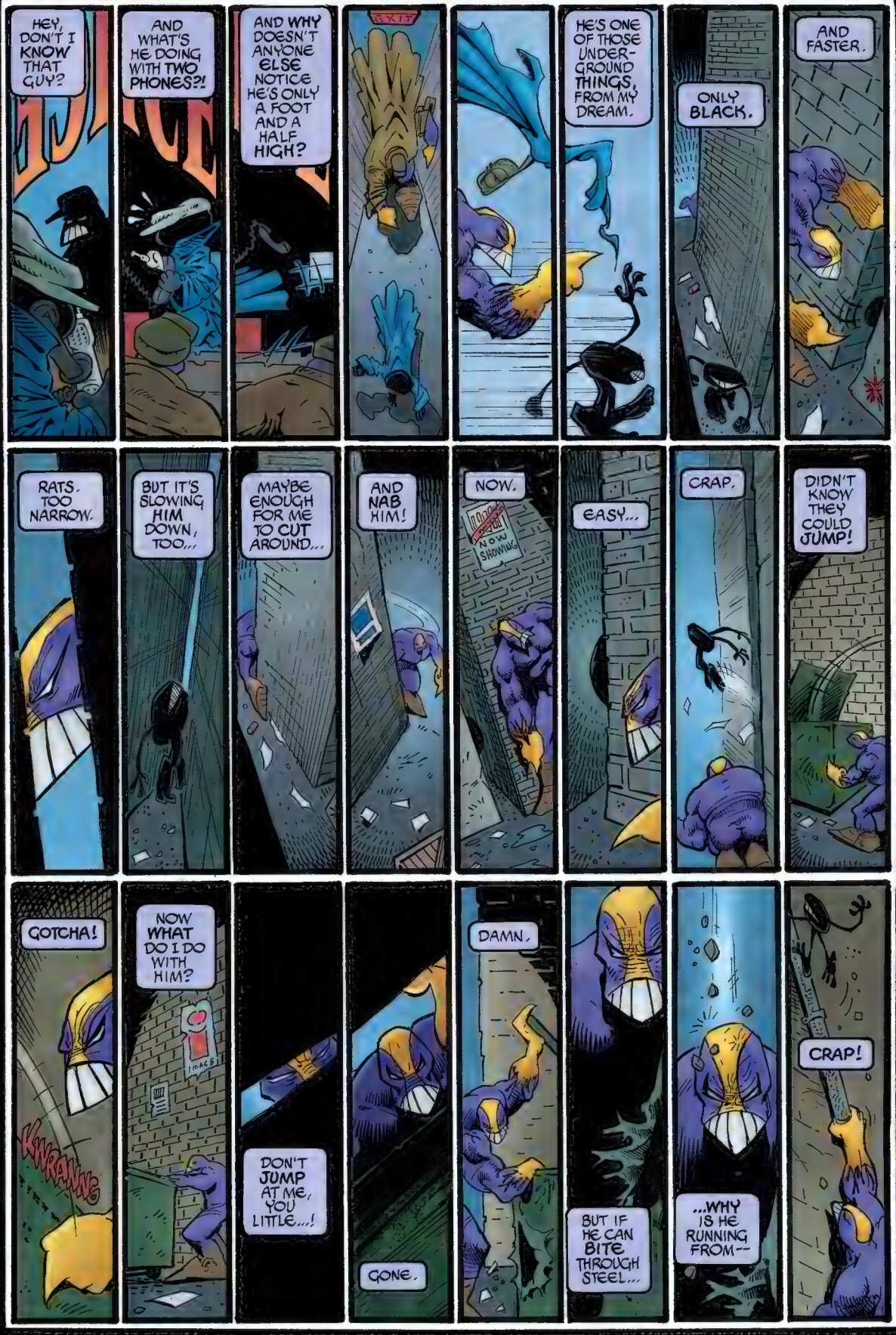
THEY COME OUT OF THE GROUND... PULLING ME DOWN...
I HAVE TO FIGHT BACK, OR BE DESTROYED!
THEN I WAKE UP. AS USUAL IT WAS ALL A DREAM.
ALLEY OOP, SNOOKS, IT'S ALMOST NIGHT. THIS IS MY HOUSE. NOT A HOTEL.
I BOUGHT YOU A COAT AND HAT, SO YOU WON'T BE QUITE SO CONSPICUOUS.
NOT THAT BEING LARGE, VIOLENT, PURPLE AND YELLOW ISN'T A GOOD DISGUISE...
BIG GULP
BUY MILK
THROW OUT MILK


SO, GLORIE, WHERE'D YOU GET THE KNIFE?
FROM MY POP. F'R PROTECTION. HE SAYS IT'S DANGEROUS AROUND HERE.
MAYTAG
MAYTAG
WHAT YOU WANT TO DO WHILE THE JACKETS DRY?
I DUNNO. I FEEL RILLY EXISTENTIAL TODAY. LIKE DARBY O'GILL AND THE LITTLE PEOPLE OR SOMETHIN'
?
HEY, TOMMY. CUT IT OUT, 'KAY?
JUST 'CAUSE WE'RE DRYING OUR JACKETS TOGETHER DOESN'T MEAN YOU GET TOUCHING PRIVILEGES.
GET US SOME COKES, 'KAY, AN' COOL OFF!
SURE, GLORIE.
GEEZ, DON'T GET MAD.
THAT TOMMY, WHATTA DOOF!
BUT HE'S A SWEET DOOF...
Huh?

WHO'S THERE...?
I CAN HEAR THE BEATING OF HER HEART
SHE IS LIKE A SMALL, DELICIOUS SLUG. I HAVE ONLY TO CLOSE MY HAND TO POSSESS HER.
CRAP.
HI, HONEY. I'M HOME.
MEEP
MEEP
MEEP
MEEP
MEEP!
MEEP


GET AWAY!
I'LL CUT YOU!
NO. I DO NOT THINK YOU WILL.
GLORIE?
UUUHH
"LISTEN, GLORIE. IF Y'R ALWAYS GONNA SEND ME OUT TO BUY COKES AN' BURGERS AN' STUFF, THEN WE'RE GOIN' STEADY!"
YEAH, THAT'S WHAT I'LL SAY.
"AN' IF WE'RE GOIN' STEADY THEN THAT MEANS..."
I HURT, TOMMY...
OH, GOD.
HE DID THINGS TO ME...

TRY NOT TO GET INTO ANY FIGHTS, OKAY, MAXX?
THE WOMAN I SAVED YESTERDAY WAS RAPED AND MUTILATED. IT SAID SO ON THE NEWS. I HAVE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT.
SPOKEN LIKE A TRUE FANATIC! A FEW WOMEN WHO CAN'T TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES GET MESSED WITH AND YOU RIDE TO THE RESCUE!
WHO ARE YOU TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR LIVES?
PAGLIA
SEX, ART, AND AMERICAN CULTURE
PRINGG
I AM THE MAXX. ANSWER YOUR PHONE.
HULLO?
THE OTHERS CRY OUT FOR YOU, JULIE WINTERS! THEIR SCREAMS OF AGONY ARE THE KISSES THAT I PLACE ALONG YOUR NECK!
THAT'S... VERY INTERESTING. TELL ME MORE.
BIG GULP
STUDY #47041
CALL SAM ERS-9110.
DEAR
DOUBTLESS ONE OF YOUR FRIENDS IN THE POLICE DEPARTMENT HAS TAPPED THIS LINE...
NO MATTER. I AM HAVING A... SERVANT OF MINE PLACE THIS CALL!


HEY, DON'T I KNOW THAT GUY?
AND WHAT'S HE DOING WITH TWO PHONES?!
AND WHY DOESN'T ANYONE ELSE NOTICE HE'S ONLY A FOOT AND A HALF HIGH?
EXIT
HE'S ONE OF THOSE UNDER-GROUND THINGS, FROM MY DREAM.
ONLY BLACK.
AND FASTER.
RATS. TOO NARROW.
BUT IT'S SLOWING HIM DOWN, TOO...
MAYBE ENOUGH FOR ME TO CUT AROUND...
AND NAB HIM!
NOW.
NOW SHOWING
EASY...
CRAP.
DIDN'T KNOW THEY COULD JUMP!
GOTCHA!
KWRANNG
NOW WHAT DO I DO WITH HIM?
DON'T JUMP AT ME, YOU LITTLE...!
GONE.
DAMN.
BUT IF HE CAN BITE THROUGH STEEL...
...WHY IS HE RUNNING FROM--
CRAP!

I'LL...
SPLOARSH
GREETINGS, BR'ER LAPP!N.
WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?
AMAZ!NG...
SELF
1.19%
1.29%
1.39%
SELF
FULL
FORD

YOU REALLY DON'T REMEMBER ANY OF IT! NOT THE GIRL OR THE ISZ OR THE BLOODWORMS OR ME.
THEN IT WASN'T ALL A DREAM! UNLESS I WAS DREAMING NOW.
TOO BAD. I NORMALLY HATE KILLING AMNESIACS.
MEEP!
OH, GOD. NOW I REMEMBER ...!

IT WAS ALL COMING BACK TO ME. I COULD FEEL THE HOT SUN ON MY BACKSKIN AND THE GRASSES UNDER MY TOES.

THOSE LITTLE CREATURES WERE ISZ. BUT TWISTED AND CHANGED BY BEING MOVED TO THIS WORLD.

TRUE ENOUGH. TOO BAD YOU'LL BE EATEN BEFORE YOU'LL HAVE A CHANCE TO MUTTER THIS TO ANYONE!

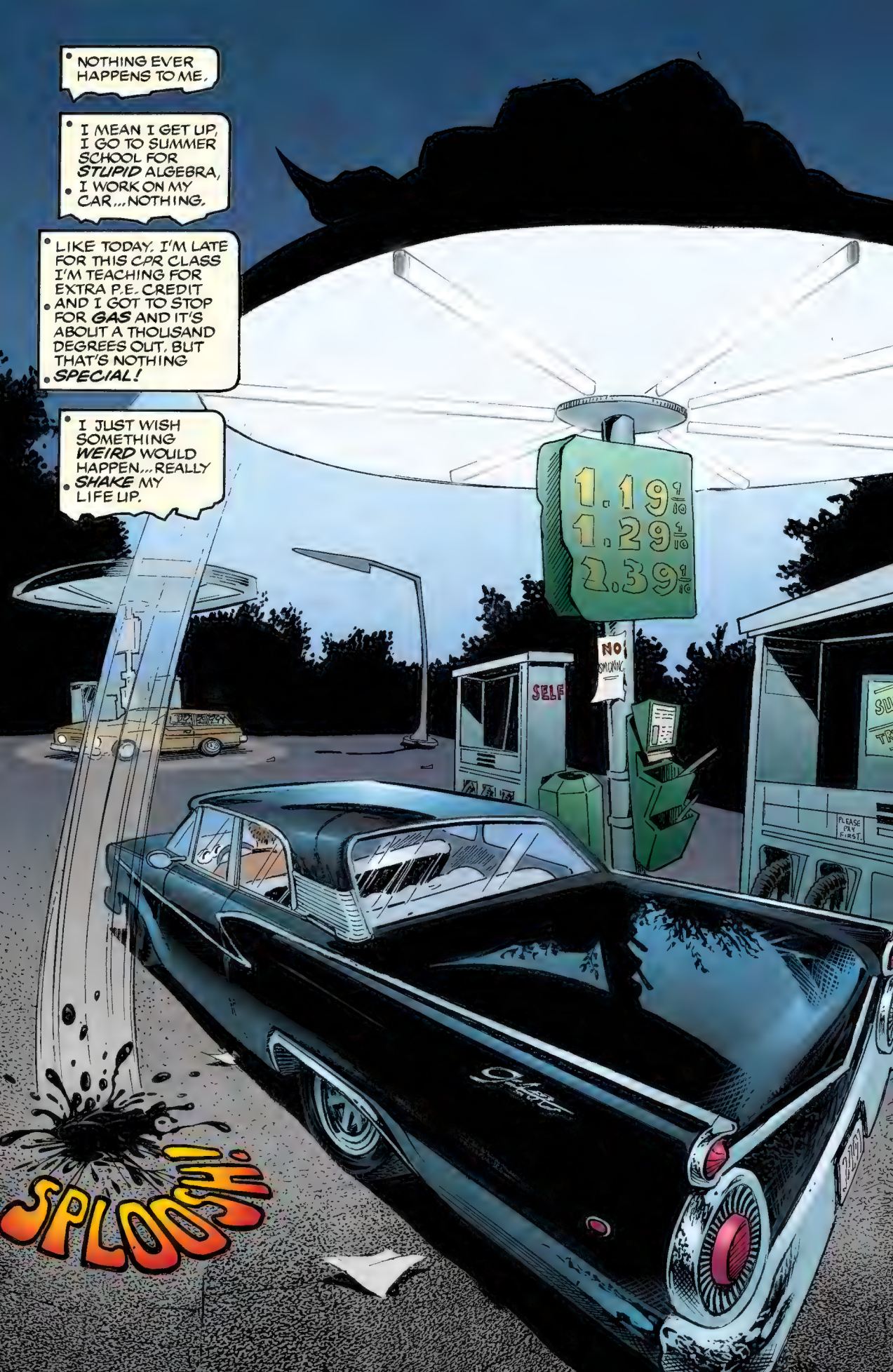
DAMN... STILL TALKING OUT LOUD!

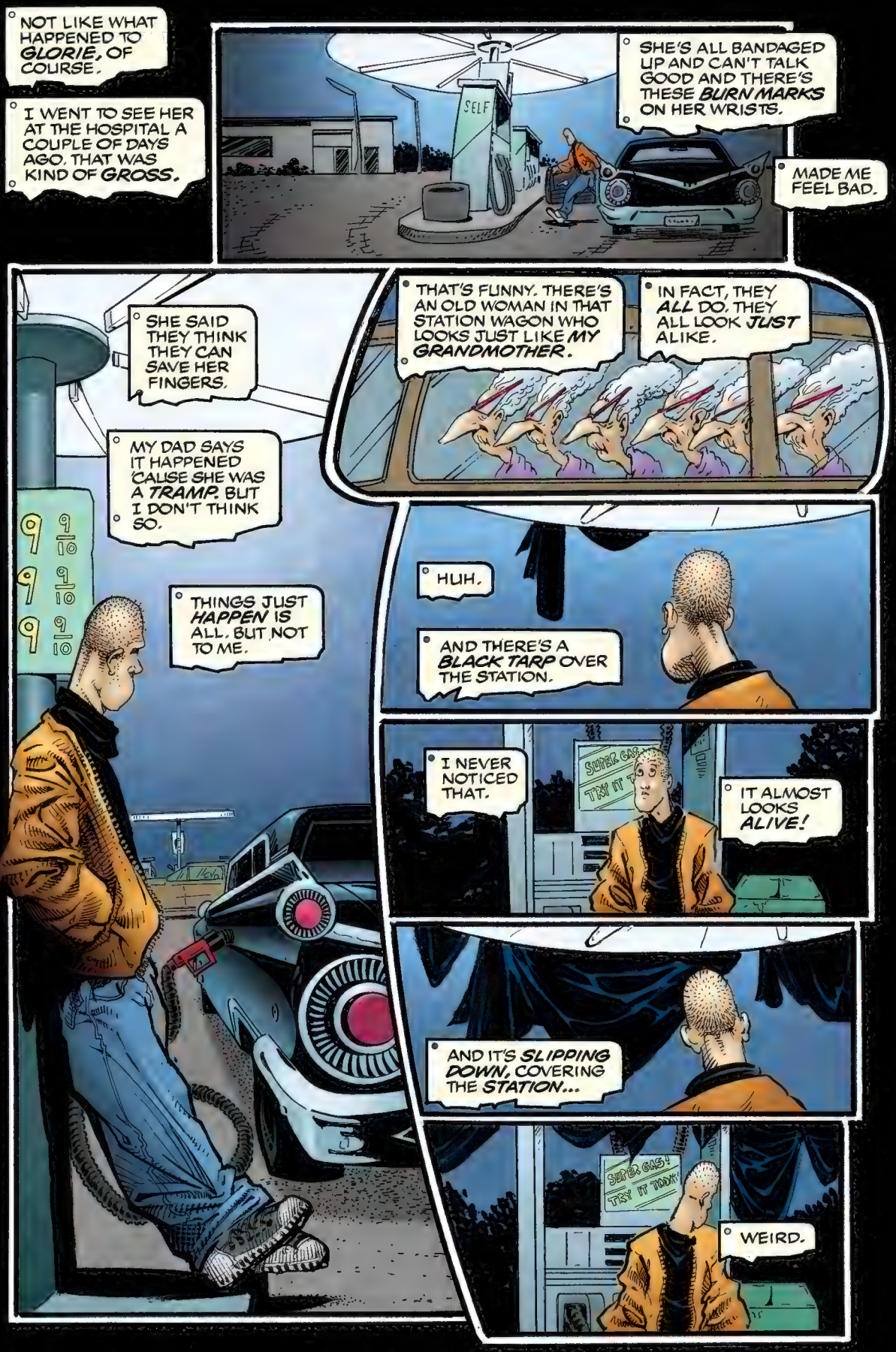
HAHAHA

NEXT MONTH
STAINED TEETH, DEADLY TEETH!

Two

PRODIGY
THREE WHOLE WEEKS OF DIETING... COTTAGE CHEESE AND FRUIT PLATES AND YOGURT...
...AND SHE'S GAINED FIVE POUNDS?
Oh... POOP!
MAYBE THERE WAS SOMETHING IN THE FRIDGE, SOMETHING UNFATTENING... SOMETHING NICE...
MEEP!
MOO COW LOWFAT MILK
MEEP
MEEP
MEEP
MEEP
MEEP
Snatchhh!
MEEP
MEEP


NOTHING EVER HAPPENS TO ME.
I MEAN I GET UP, I GO TO SUMMER SCHOOL FOR STUPID ALGEBRA, I WORK ON MY CAR... NOTHING.
LIKE TODAY. I'M LATE FOR THIS CPR CLASS I'M TEACHING FOR EXTRA P.E. CREDIT AND I GOT TO STOP FOR GAS AND IT'S ABOUT A THOUSAND DEGREES OUT, BUT THAT'S NOTHING SPECIAL!
I JUST WISH SOMETHING WEIRD WOULD HAPPEN... REALLY SHAKE MY LIFE UP.
1.19 9/10
1.29 9/10
1.39 9/10
NO SMOKING
SELF
PLEASE PAY FIRST
SPLOSH!

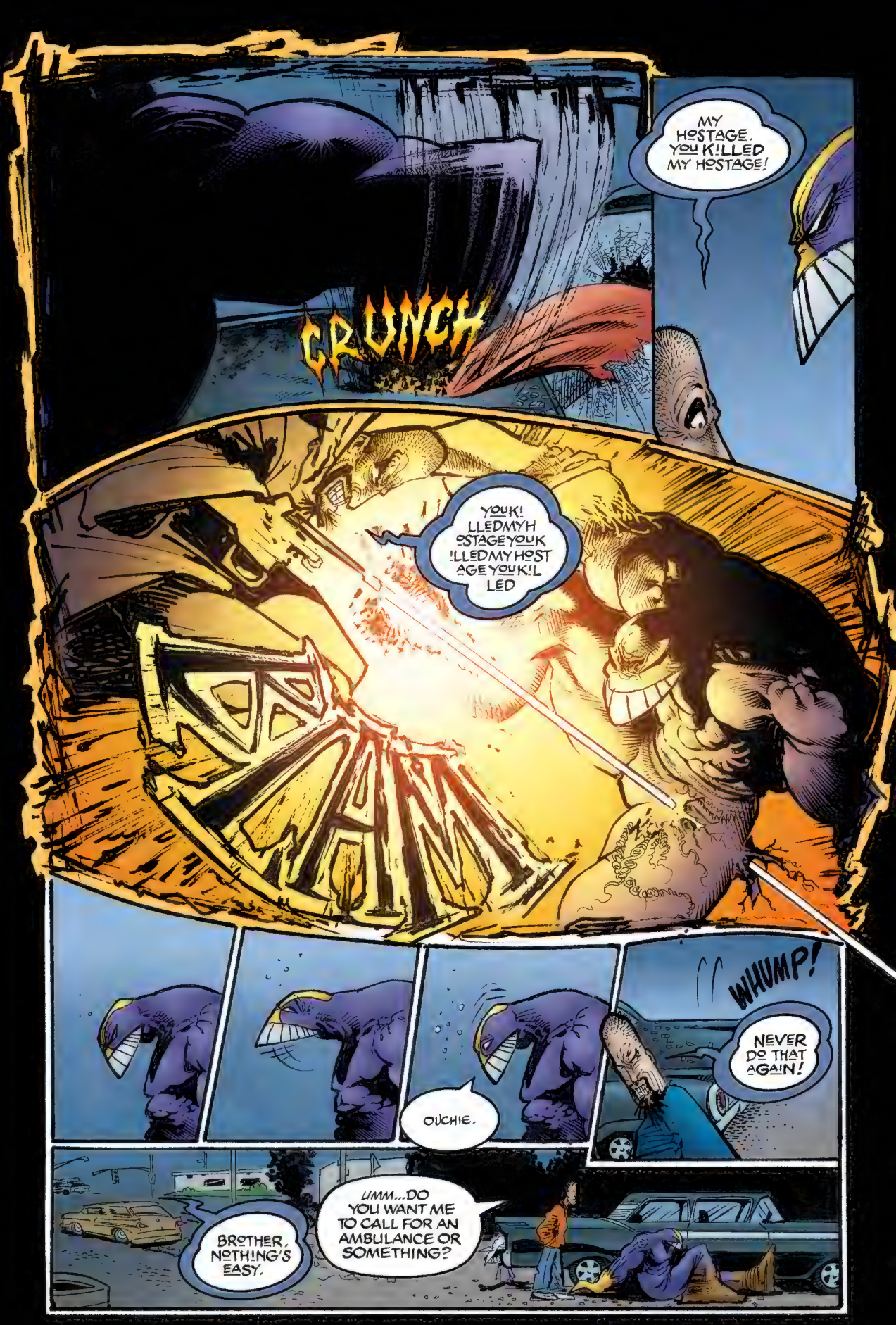

NOT LIKE WHAT HAPPENED TO GLORIE, OF COURSE.
I WENT TO SEE HER AT THE HOSPITAL A COUPLE OF DAYS AGO. THAT WAS KIND OF GROSS.
SELF
SHE'S ALL BANDAGED UP AND CAN'T TALK GOOD AND THERE'S THESE BURN MARKS ON HER WRISTS.
MADE ME FEEL BAD.
SHE SAID THEY THINK THEY CAN SAVE HER FINGERS.
MY DAD SAYS IT HAPPENED 'CAUSE SHE WAS A TRAMP. BUT I DON'T THINK SO.
THINGS JUST HAPPEN IS ALL. BUT NOT TO ME.
THAT'S FUNNY. THERE'S AN OLD WOMAN IN THAT STATION WAGON WHO LOOKS JUST LIKE MY GRANDMOTHER.
IN FACT, THEY ALL DO. THEY ALL LOOK JUST ALIKE.
HUH.
AND THERE'S A BLACK TARP OVER THE STATION.
I NEVER NOTICED THAT.
SUPER GAS! TRY IT TODAY!
IT ALMOST LOOKS ALIVE!
AND IT'S SLIPPING DOWN, COVERING THE STATION...
SUPER GAS! TRY IT TODAY!
WEIRD.

MAYBE IT'S SOME KIND OF AUTOMATIC SUNSHADE.
SELF
BUT YOU CAN'T SEE TO PUMP GAS IN THERE.
WHAT IF THERE'S A SWITCH...?
IF I WAS TO TUG ON THIS THING REALLY HARD...
FFOOSSH!
FFOOSSH!
FFOOO

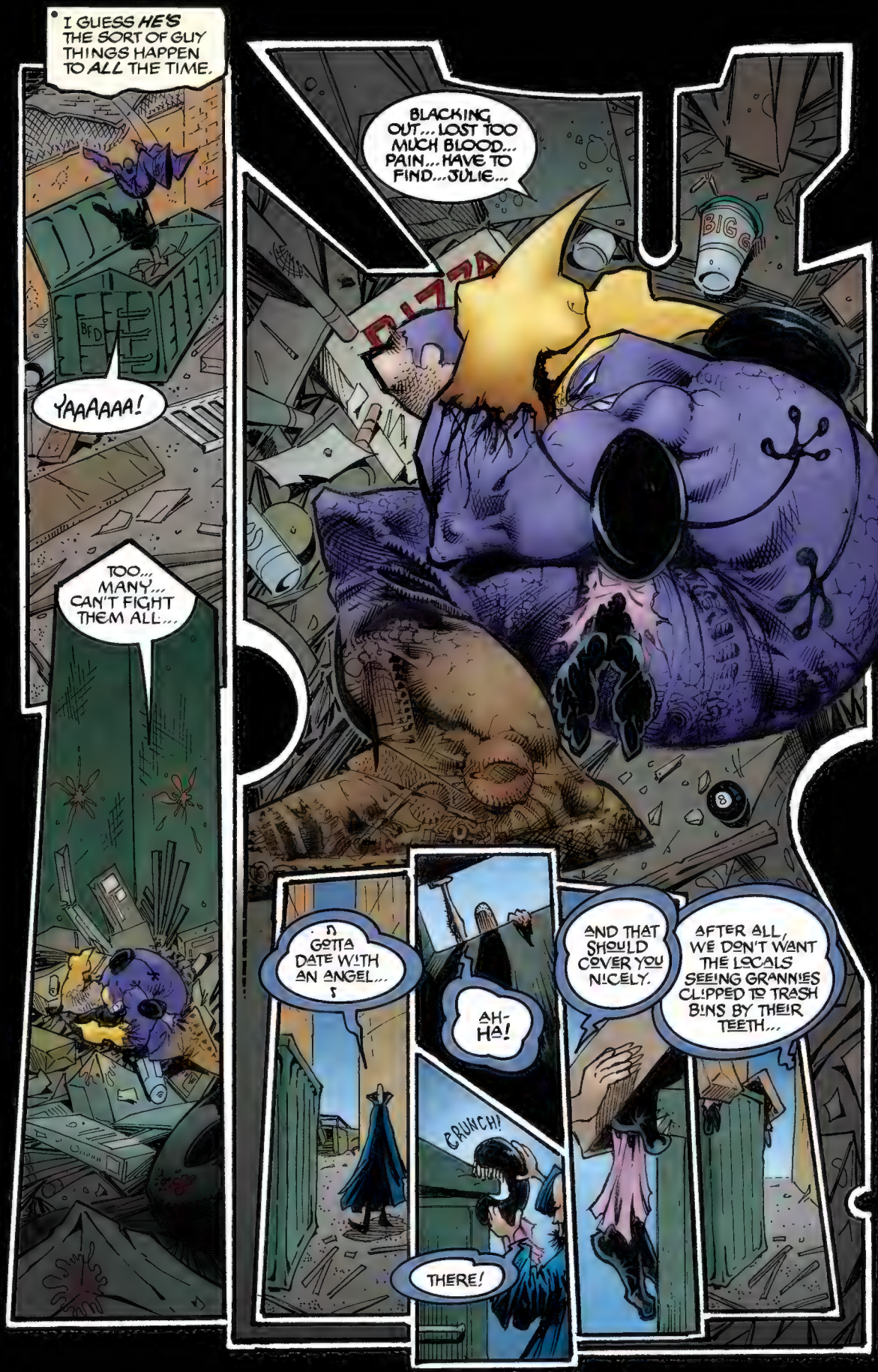
OH, I GET IT! IT'S THAT GUY'S CAPE!
THAT'S A RELIEF!
I WAS AFRAID I BROKE IT!
THUD

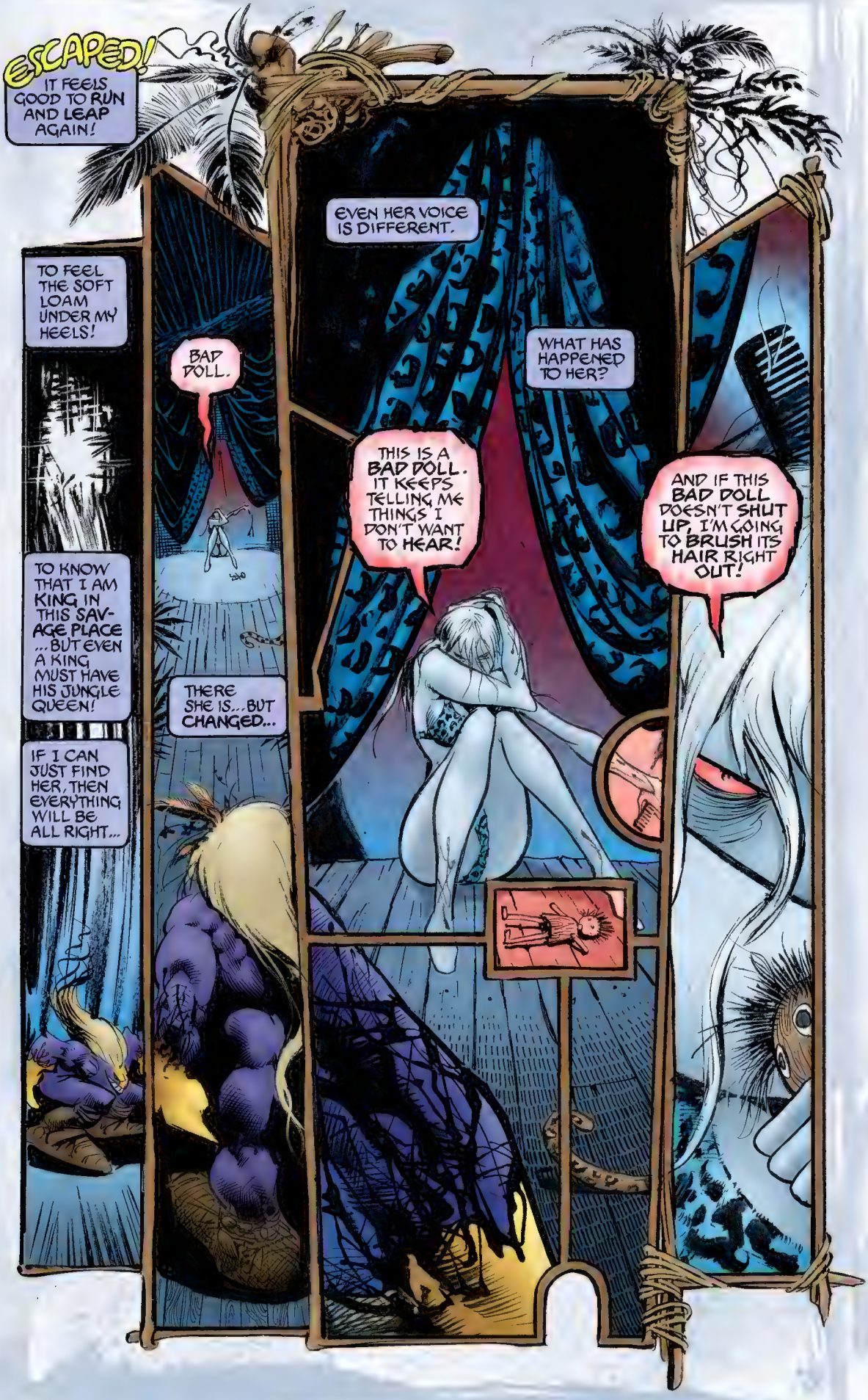
'COURSE, NOW I GOT TWO BIG GUYS, FIGHTING, ON THE HOOD OF MY CAR.
GIVE IT UP, BR'ER LAPP!N! YOU...GASP...KNOW JULIE WINTERS IS THE ONE I WANT! SHE'S...WHEEZ... THE STRONG ONE...
THE ONE WHO PULLS ...HANT... YOUR STRINGS!
IT'S KIND OF NEAT, ACTUALLY.
UHHH... WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
AND WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?
WHUM!

YOU REALLY DON'T REMEMBER ANYTH'NG 'MPORTANT, DO YOU, BR'ER LAPPIN?
I'M MR. GONE!...A STUDENT OF THE MYST'C ARTS!
UNFORTUNATELY, AN UNTALENTED STUDENT, OR I WOULDN'T HAVE TO KEEP SHOOT'NG FOOLS L'KE YOU!
HEY! PUT THAT DOWN, OR I'LL—
KRATTCHHH!
I THOUGHT I SAW A WOMAN 'N THERE!
NOW SURRENDER, HOPPING-BOY, OR TH'S CHARMING YOUNG CHIPPIE 'S ADDED TO MY SCORE!

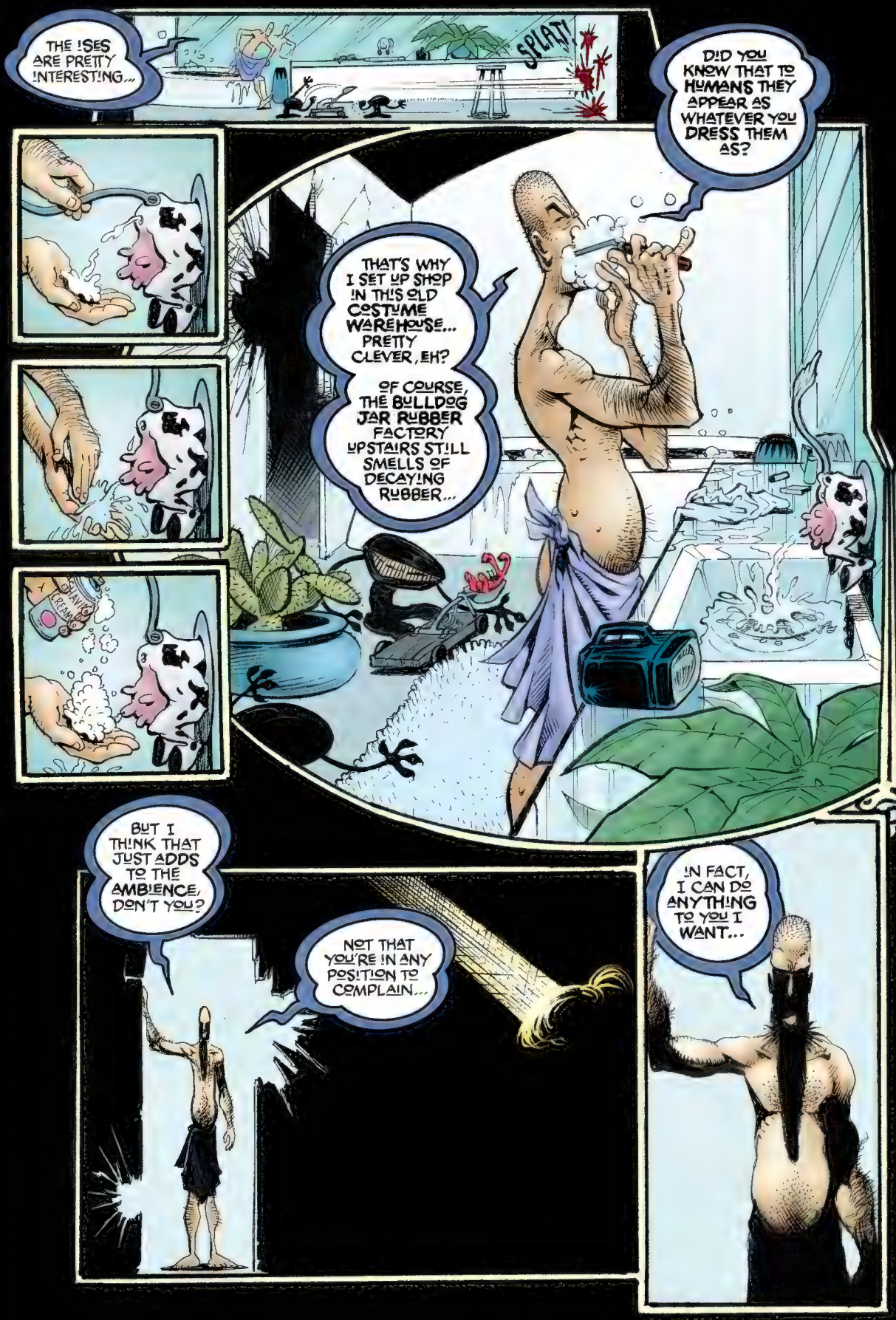

MY HOSTAGE. YOU K!LLED MY HOSTAGE!
CRUNCH
YOUK! LLEDMYH OSTAGEYOUK !LLEDMYHOST AGEYOUK!L LED
WHUMP!
NEVER DO THAT AGAIN!
OUCHIE.
UMM...DO YOU WANT ME TO CALL FOR AN AMBULANCE OR SOMETHING?
BROTHER. NOTH!NG'S EASY.

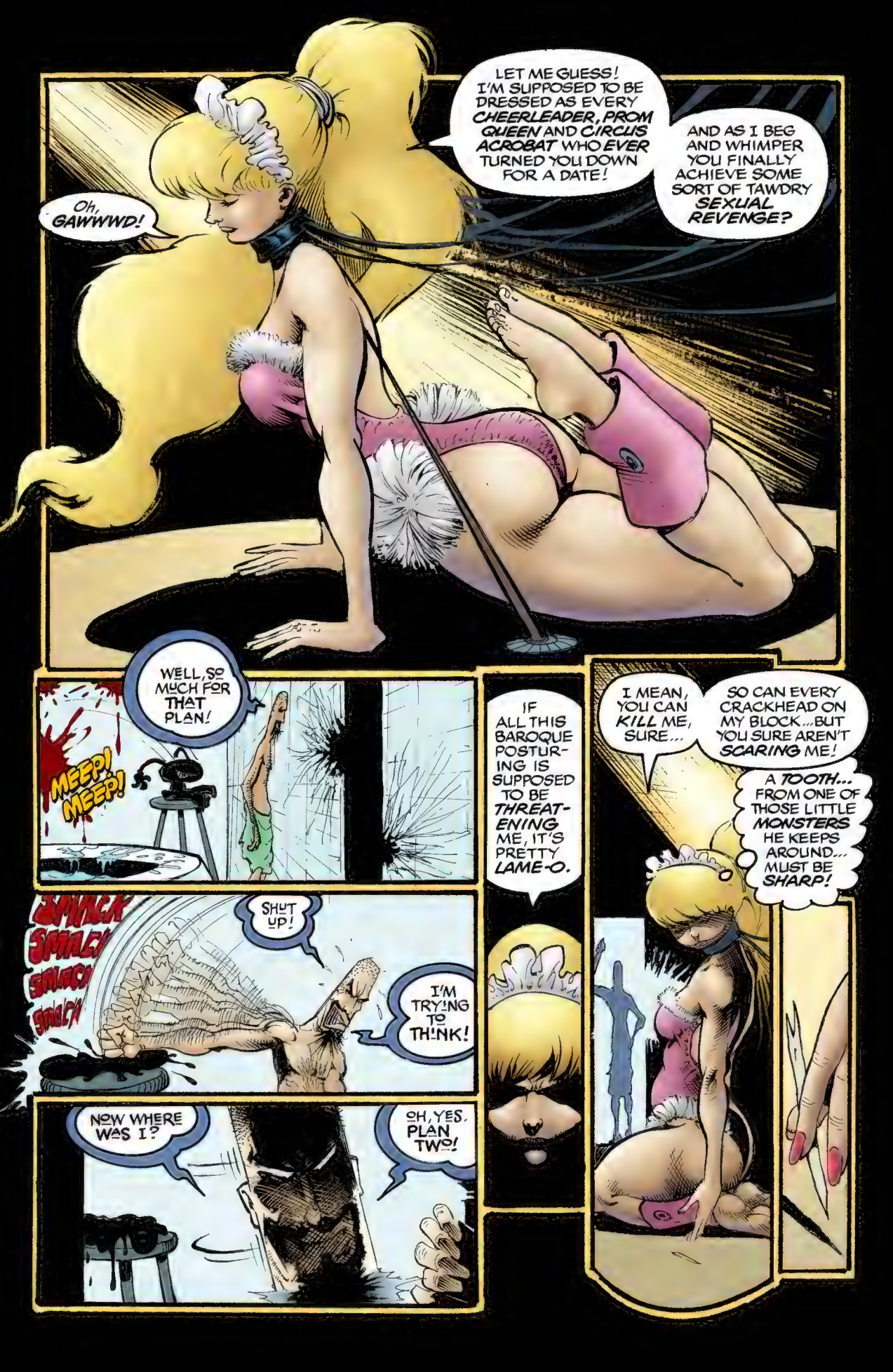
THAT WAS REALLY SMART, HOW YOU REALIZED THAT WAS MY CPR PRACTICE DUMMY... uh...
YOU DID REALIZE THAT WAS MY CPR PRACTICE DUMMY, RIGHT, MISTER?
RIGHT...?
A DUMMY?
UH. RIGHT.
YAAAAAA!
IT WAS THE LITTLE OLD LADIES, THEY MUST'VE JUMPED OUT OF THE STATION WAGON FROM BEFORE.
I WAS STARTING TO THINK IT WAS GETTING PRETTY HAZARDOUS AROUND HERE.
WELL, IT WAS NICE TO MEET YOU... I GOTTA BE GOING NOW...
HE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING. BUT THEN HE WAS PRETTY BUSY.

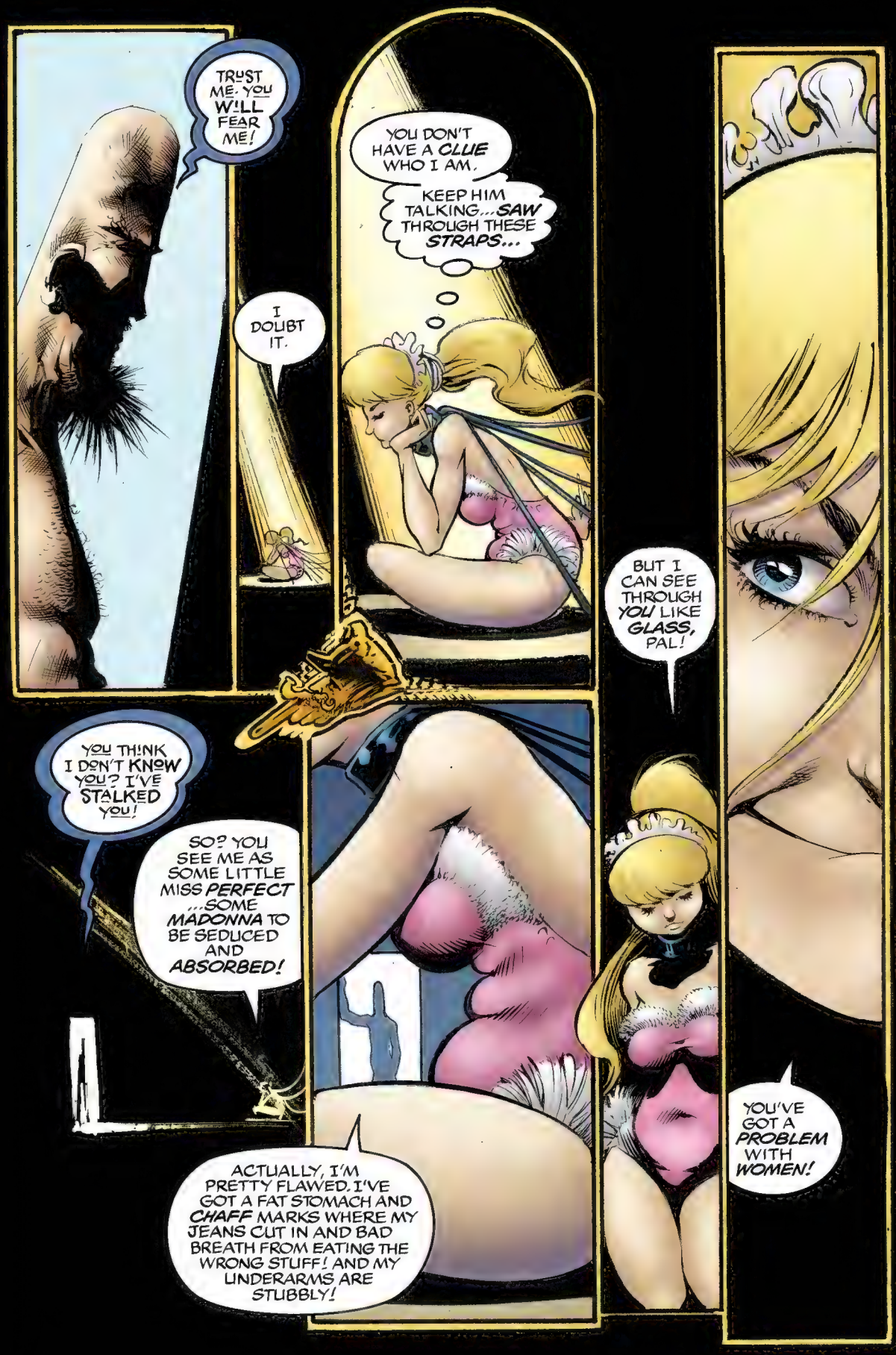

I GUESS HE'S THE SORT OF GUY THINGS HAPPEN TO ALL THE TIME.
YAAAAAA!
TOO... MANY... CAN'T FIGHT THEM ALL...
BLACKING OUT... LOST TOO MUCH BLOOD... PAIN... HAVE TO FIND... JULIE...
BIG G
PIZZA
GOTTA DATE WITH AN ANGEL...
AH-HA!
CRUNCH!
THERE!
AND THAT SHOULD COVER YOU NICELY.
AFTER ALL, WE DON'T WANT THE LOCALS SEEING GRANNIES CLIPPED TO TRASH BINS BY THEIR TEETH...

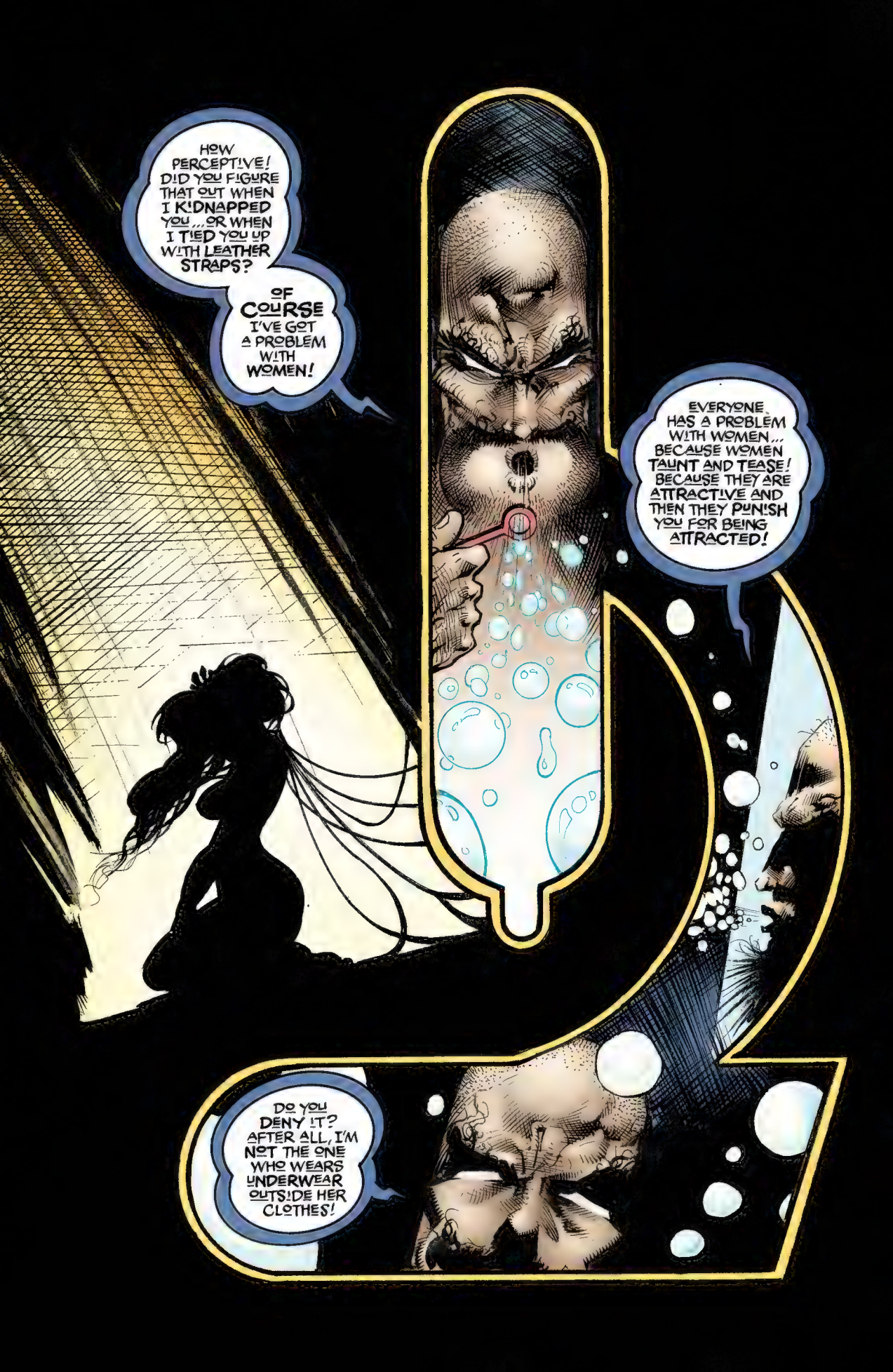

ESCAPED!
IT FEELS GOOD TO RUN AND LEAP AGAIN!
TO FEEL THE SOFT LOAM UNDER MY HEELS!
TO KNOW THAT I AM KING IN THIS SAVAGE PLACE ...BUT EVEN A KING MUST HAVE HIS JUNGLE QUEEN!
IF I CAN JUST FIND HER, THEN EVERYTHING WILL BE ALL RIGHT...
BAD DOLL.
THERE SHE IS...BUT CHANGED...
EVEN HER VOICE IS DIFFERENT.
WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO HER?
THIS IS A BAD DOLL. IT KEEPS TELLING ME THINGS I DON'T WANT TO HEAR!
AND IF THIS BAD DOLL DOESN'T SHUT UP, I'M GOING TO BRUSH ITS HAIR RIGHT OUT!

ELSEWHERE, ON THE PASTEL, DECAYING, ART DECO SIDE OF TOWN...
I RAN INTO YOUR FRIEND MAXX TODAY, JULIE.
HE STILL HASN'T GOT A CLUE THAT YOU'RE THE KEY TO ALL THIS. HE THINKS HE'S SOME KIND OF SUPERHERO ON THIS WORLD. CAN YOU IMAGINE?
I KILLED HIM, OF COURSE. SHOT HIM AND LOCKED HIM IN A DUMPSTER WITH A HANDFUL OF THE DARK ISES. THEY TURN MEAT-EATERS WHEN YOU BRING THEM OVER. DID YOU KNOW THAT?
POP
POP
POP
AHHH... LIFE IS GOOD!


THE !SES ARE PRETTY !NTERESTI!NG...
SPLAT!
DID YOU KNOW THAT TO HUMANS THEY APPEAR AS WHATEVER YOU DRESS THEM AS?
THAT'S WHY I SET UP SHOP !N TH!S OLD COSTUME WAREHOUSE... PRETTY CLEVER, EH?
OF COURSE, THE BULLDOG JAR RUBBER FACTORY UPSTAIRS ST!LL SMELLS OF DECAY!NG RUBBER...
SHAVING CREAM
BUT I TH!NK THAT JUST ADDS TO THE AMB!ENCE, DON'T YOU?
NOT THAT YOU'RE !N ANY POS!T!ON TO COMPLA!N...
!N FACT, I CAN DO ANYTH!NG TO YOU I WANT...


Oh, GAWWWD!
LET ME GUESS! I'M SUPPOSED TO BE DRESSED AS EVERY CHEERLEADER, PROM QUEEN AND CIRCUS ACROBAT WHO EVER TURNED YOU DOWN FOR A DATE!
AND AS I BEG AND WHIMPER YOU FINALLY ACHIEVE SOME SORT OF TAWDRY SEXUAL REVENGE?
WELL, SO MUCH FOR THAT PLAN!
MEEP! MEEP!
IF ALL THIS BAROQUE POSTURING IS SUPPOSED TO BE THREATENING ME, IT'S PRETTY LAME-O.
I MEAN, YOU CAN KILL ME, SURE...
SO CAN EVERY CRACKHEAD ON MY BLOCK...BUT YOU SURE AREN'T SCARING ME!
A TOOTH... FROM ONE OF THOSE LITTLE MONSTERS HE KEEPS AROUND... MUST BE SHARP!
SMACK SMACK SMACK SMACK
SHUT UP!
I'M TRYING TO THINK!
NOW WHERE WAS I?
OH, YES. PLAN TWO!

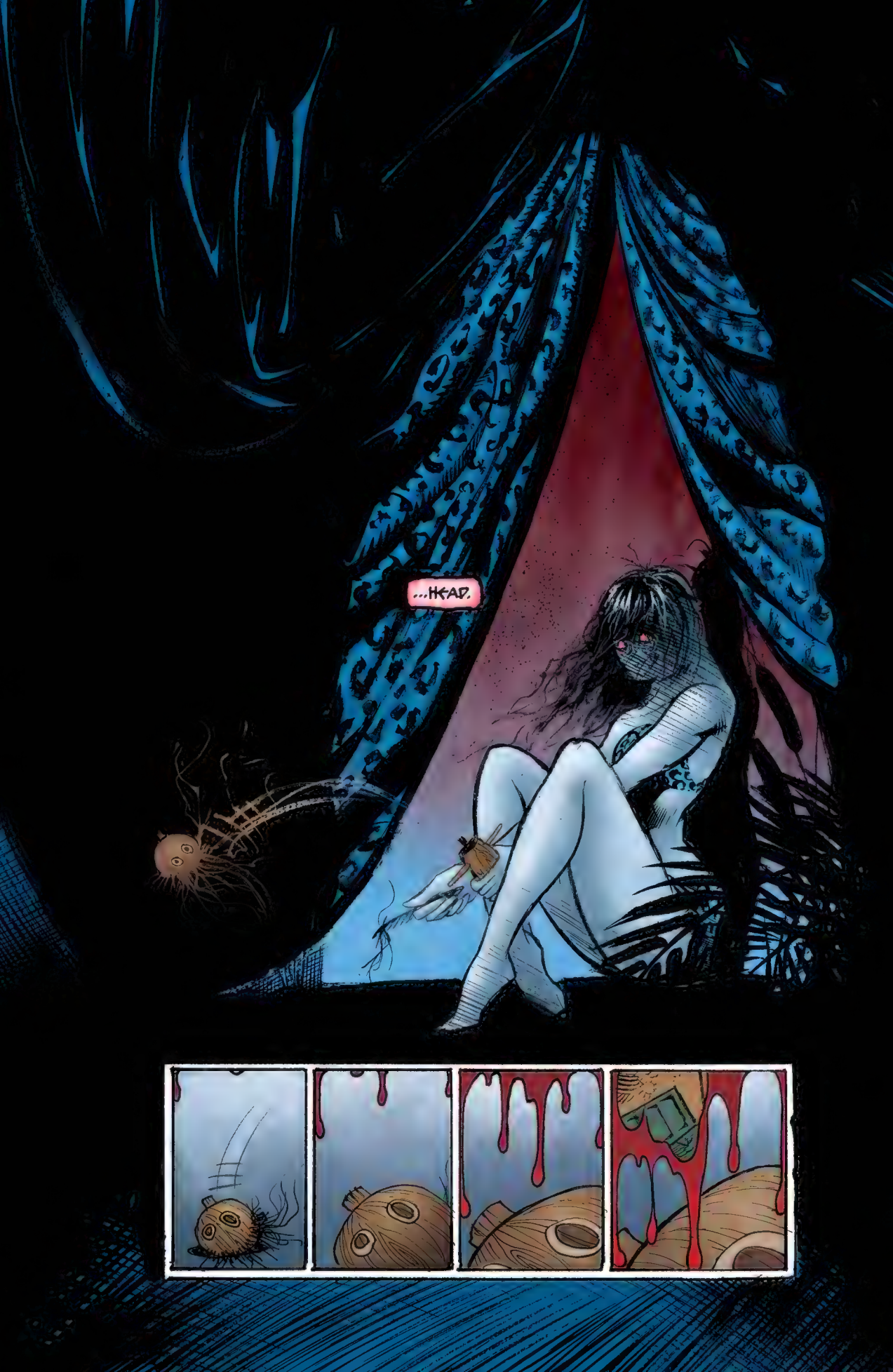

TRUST ME. YOU WILL FEAR ME!
I DOUBT IT.
YOU DON'T HAVE A CLUE WHO I AM.
KEEP HIM TALKING... SAW THROUGH THESE STRAPS...
BUT I CAN SEE THROUGH YOU LIKE GLASS, PAL!
YOU'VE GOT A PROBLEM WITH WOMEN!
YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW YOU? I'VE STALKED YOU!
SO? YOU SEE ME AS SOME LITTLE MISS PERFECT ...SOME MADONNA TO BE SEDUCED AND ABSORBED!
ACTUALLY, I'M PRETTY FLAWED. I'VE GOT A FAT STOMACH AND CHAFF MARKS WHERE MY JEANS CUT IN AND BAD BREATH FROM EATING THE WRONG STUFF! AND MY UNDERARMS ARE STUBBLY!


HOW PERCEPTIVE! DID YOU FIGURE THAT OUT WHEN I KIDNAPPED YOU... OR WHEN I TIED YOU UP WITH LEATHER STRAPS?
OF COURSE I'VE GOT A PROBLEM WITH WOMEN!
EVERYONE HAS A PROBLEM WITH WOMEN... BECAUSE WOMEN TAUNT AND TEASE! BECAUSE THEY ARE ATTRACTIVE AND THEN THEY PUNISH YOU FOR BEING ATTRACTED!
DO YOU DENY IT? AFTER ALL, I'M NOT THE ONE WHO WEARS UNDERWEAR OUTSIDE HER CLOTHES!

YOU CLAIM TO BE A "PRO-SEX FEMINIST"! YOU QUOTE CAMILLE PAGLIA... ENDLESSLY, I MIGHT ADD.
BUT WOULD A FEMINIST OF ANY STRIPE BE SO DELIBERATELY RISK-TAKING? OR ARE YOU ONLY A FEMINIST WHEN IT SUITS YOU?
YOU DROPPED OUT OF COLLEGE, SET UP THIS "FREE-LANCE SOCIAL WORK" OF YOURS, STARTED BAILING PEOPLE OUT OF JAIL, TRYING TO REFORM THEM...
YOU'RE NEARLY BROKE, SURROUNDED BY DANGEROUS, DESPERATE MEN... AND LOOK WHERE IT'S GOTTEN YOU!
SO THIS IS *MY* FAULT?
YOU *BROKE* INTO *MY LOCKED* HOUSE AND *KIDNAPPED* ME! THIS HAS *NOTHING* TO DO WITH THE *CLOTHES* I WEAR!
THIS HAS TO DO WITH THE FACT THAT YOU'RE *TWISTED* AS A CORKSCREW, AND LOOKING TO FIND SOMEONE... WOMEN, FEMINISM, PAGLIA, ME... TO BLAME IT ON!

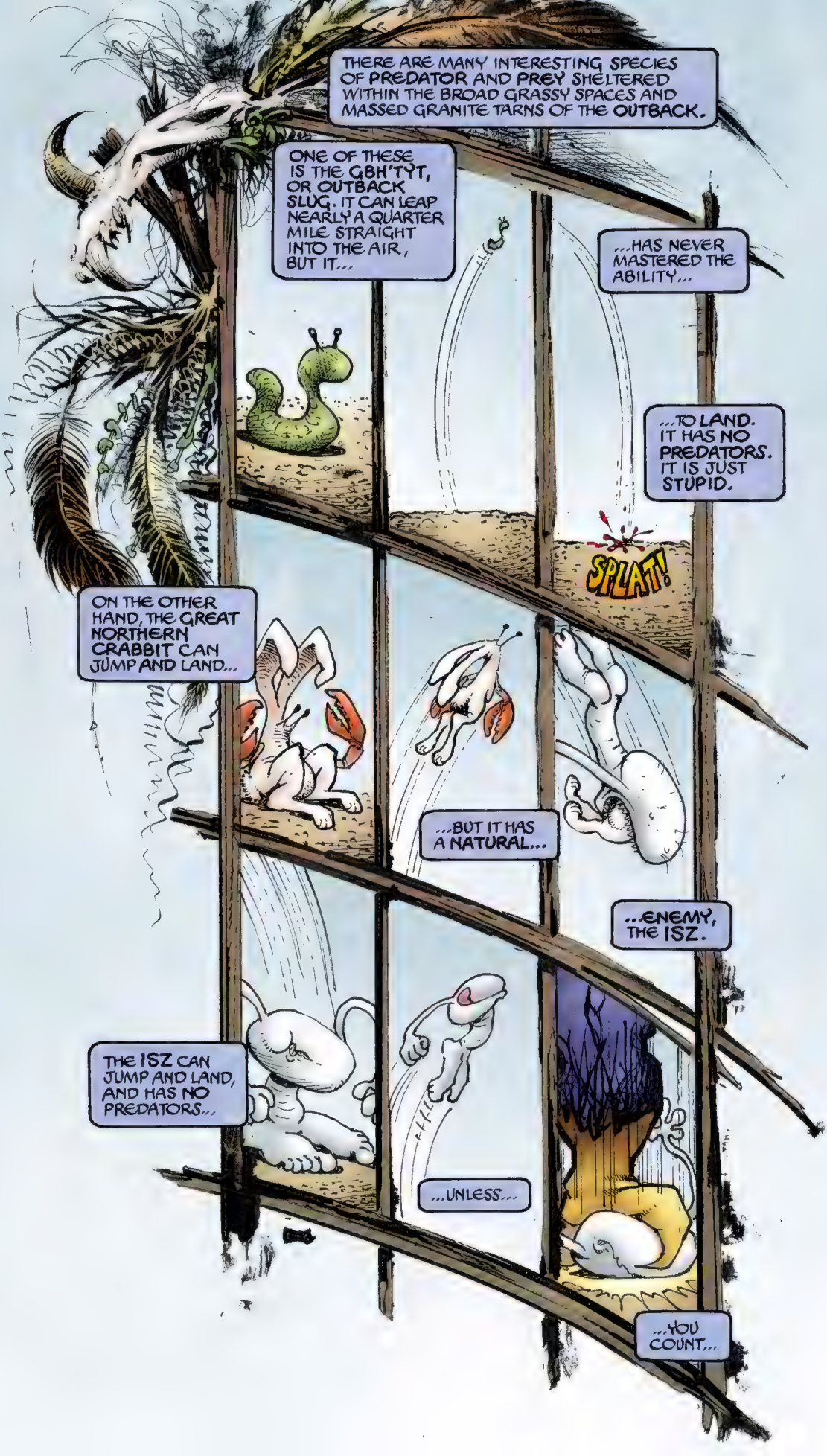
SURE I TEST THE LIMITS...SO WHAT? QUIT WHINING LIKE A BROKEN DOLL AND GET ON WITH IT!
ARE YOU SURE THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT? I CAN TELL YOU THINGS, JULIE WINTERS, THINGS YOU'VE TRIED TO FORGET.
THINGS ABOUT ME, YOURSELF...EVEN THE MAXX. THIS WHOLE ELABORATE FICTION YOU'VE BUILT UP TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM THE TRUTH.
THIS DOLL IS TELLING ME THINGS I DON'T WANT TO HEAR! AND IF IT DOESN'T SHUT UP...
DO YOU REMEMBER SPIRIT ANIMALS, JULIE? DO YOU REMEMBER...?
...I'M GONNA BRUSH ITS HEAD RIGHT OFF!
...GETTING YOUR OWN SPIRIT ANIMAL? DO YOU REMEMBER WHERE YOU WERE? WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE?
AND WHAT THE ANIMAL'S NAME WAS?
IF THIS DOLL DOESN'T SHUT UP...!

...I'M GONNA BRUSH AND BRUSH AND BRUSH...
YOU WERE NEVER ABLE TO ACCEPT THE OTHER PLANE, JULIE... NEVER ABLE TO REVEL IN IT LIKE I AM... INSTEAD YOU HIDE IN THIS FANTASY! REMEMBER, JULIE? IT'S...
UNTIL I BRUSH OFF ITS...
...ALL IN YOUR...

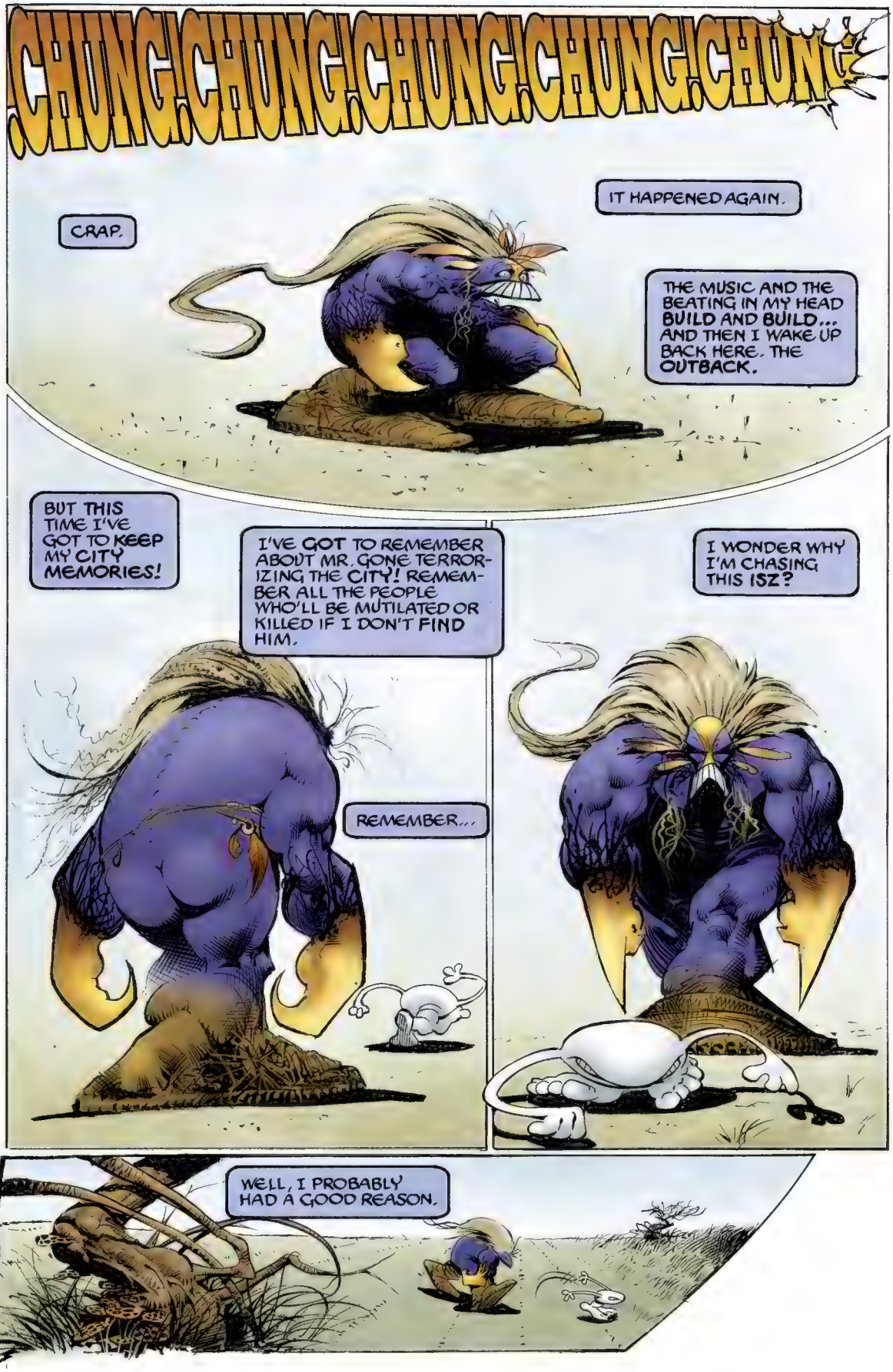

...HEAD.

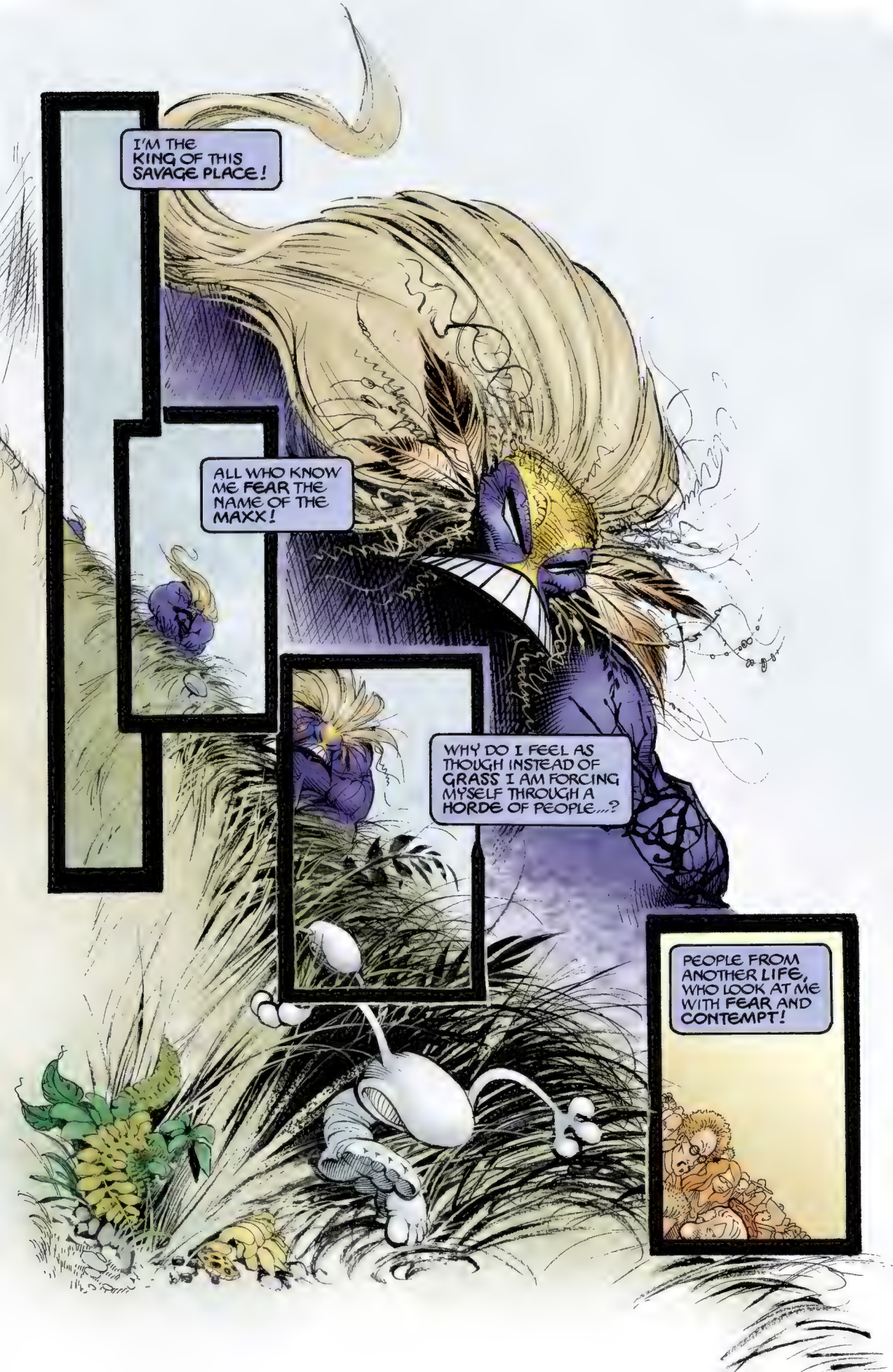
DEAD.
I AWOKE FROM THE DAYDREAM OF THE WILD PLACE AND TEETH WERE AT MY THROAT!
SO I AWOKE AND SLEW. BUT JULIE IS STILL KIDNAPPED AND THE JUNGLE QUEEN IS INSANE!
I DIDN'T PROTECT EITHER OF THEM. I FAILED.
I WISH IT WAS TIME FOR CHEERS, BUT IT'S NOT. IT'S TIME FOR VENGEANCE!
NEXT MONTH
JUNGLE FLOWERS GROWN IN BLOOD!

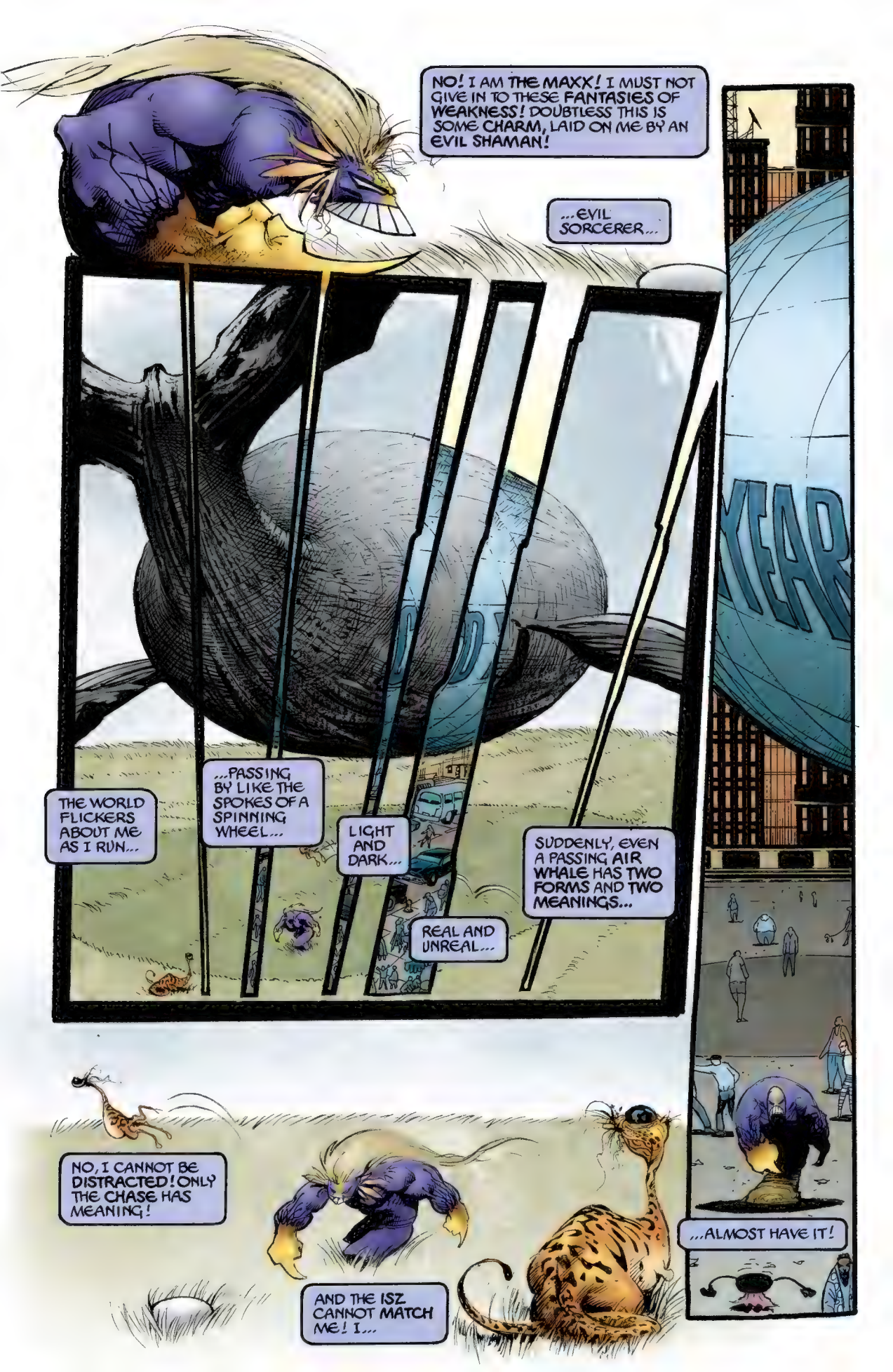
Chapter
Three

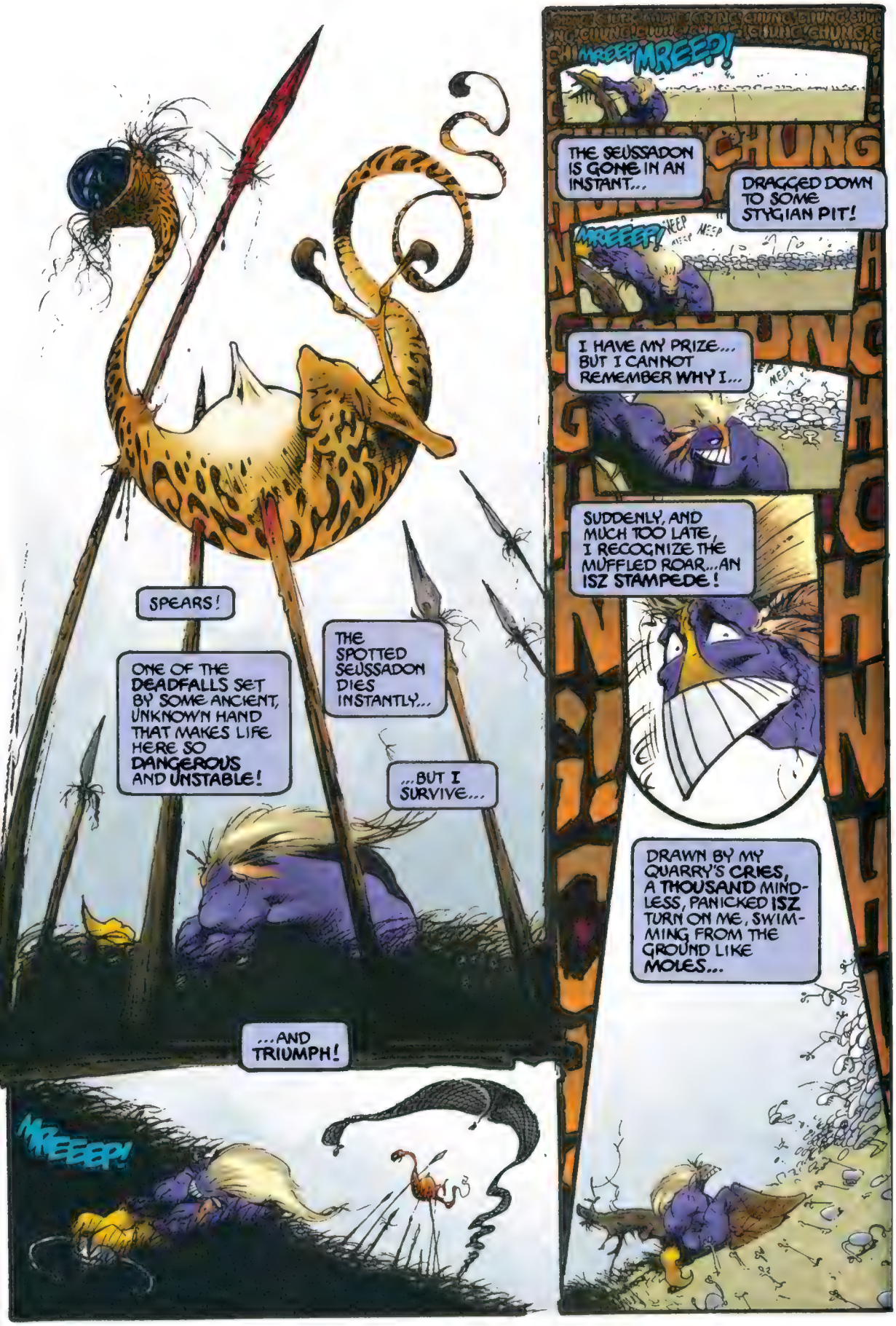

THERE ARE MANY INTERESTING SPECIES OF PREDATOR AND PREY SHELTERED WITHIN THE BROAD GRASSY SPACES AND MASSED GRANITE TARNS OF THE OUTBACK.
ONE OF THESE IS THE GBH'TYT, OR OUTBACK SLUG. IT CAN LEAP NEARLY A QUARTER MILE STRAIGHT INTO THE AIR, BUT IT...
...HAS NEVER MASTERED THE ABILITY...
...TO LAND. IT HAS NO PREDATORS. IT IS JUST STUPID.
SPLAT!
ON THE OTHER HAND, THE GREAT NORTHERN CRABBIT CAN JUMP AND LAND...
...BUT IT HAS A NATURAL...
...ENEMY, THE ISZ.
THE ISZ CAN JUMP AND LAND, AND HAS NO PREDATORS...
...UNLESS...
...YOU COUNT...

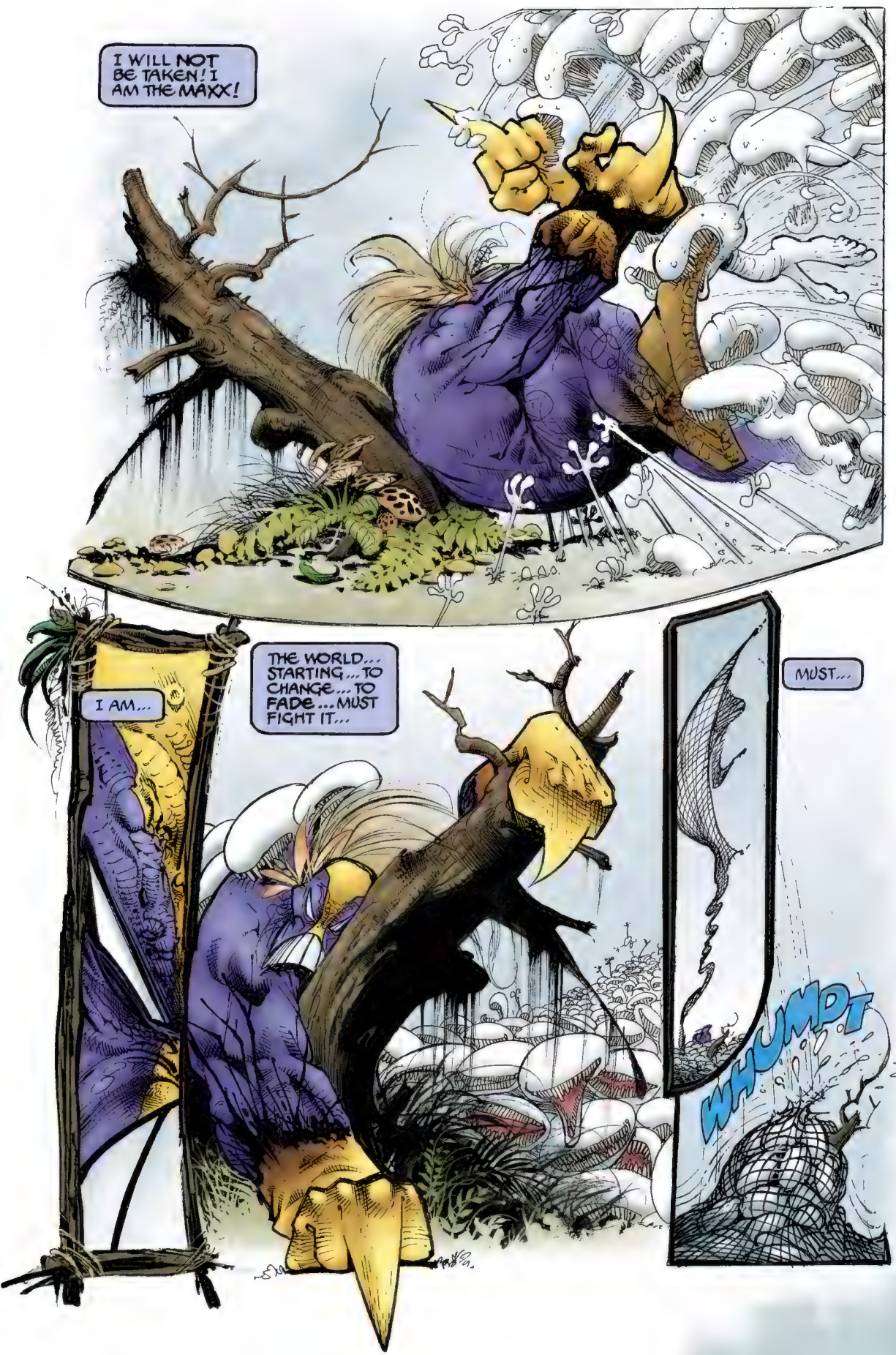
...ME!
THAT'S RIGHT, YOU LITTLE @#?#@! RUN! YOU'LL LEAD ME RIGHT TO HIM!
THE POUNDING IN MY HEAD IS LIKE AN ICE PICK, BUT I CAN'T STOP.
ONE MINUTE I SAW JULIE WINTERS IN MY MIND, DRESSED AS THE LEOPARD QUEEN AND INSANE...
...THE NEXT I WAS BACK HERE, STILL CHASING THIS LITTLE MONSTER!
THE GAWKERS GLARE AT ME, SINCE TO THEM THE ISZ LOOKS LIKE A 96 YEAR OLD GRANDMOTHER...
BUT I KNOW THAT IT IS A TOOL OF THE EVIL SORCERER, MR. GONE, WHO IS A SERIAL RAPIST AND MURDERER! HE WILL DESTROY THIS CITY UNLESS I STOP HIM!
OF COURSE, MAYBE THEY'RE ALL STARING AT ME 'CAUSE I THINK I JUST SAID ALL OF THAT OUT LOUD. OUPS.


CHUNG.CHUNG.CHUNG.CHUNG.CHUNG
CRAP.
IT HAPPENED AGAIN.
THE MUSIC AND THE BEATING IN MY HEAD BUILD AND BUILD... AND THEN I WAKE UP BACK HERE. THE OUTBACK.
BUT THIS TIME I'VE GOT TO KEEP MY CITY MEMORIES!
I'VE GOT TO REMEMBER ABOUT MR. GONE TERRORIZING THE CITY! REMEMBER ALL THE PEOPLE WHO'LL BE MUTILATED OR KILLED IF I DON'T FIND HIM.
I WONDER WHY I'M CHASING THIS ISZ?
REMEMBER...
WELL, I PROBABLY HAD A GOOD REASON.


I'M THE KING OF THIS SAVAGE PLACE!
ALL WHO KNOW ME FEAR THE NAME OF THE MAXX!
WHY DO I FEEL AS THOUGH INSTEAD OF GRASS I AM FORCING MYSELF THROUGH A HORDE OF PEOPLE...?
PEOPLE FROM ANOTHER LIFE, WHO LOOK AT ME WITH FEAR AND CONTEMPT!


NO! I AM THE MAXX! I MUST NOT GIVE IN TO THESE FANTASIES OF WEAKNESS! DOUBTLESS THIS IS SOME CHARM, LAID ON ME BY AN EVIL SHAMAN!
...EVIL SORCERER...
THE WORLD FLICKERS ABOUT ME AS I RUN...
...PASSING BY LIKE THE SPOKES OF A SPINNING WHEEL...
LIGHT AND DARK...
REAL AND UNREAL...
SUDDENLY, EVEN A PASSING AIR WHALE HAS TWO FORMS AND TWO MEANINGS...
NO, I CANNOT BE DISTRACTED! ONLY THE CHASE HAS MEANING!
AND THE ISZ CANNOT MATCH ME! I...
...ALMOST HAVE IT!


MREEP MREEP!
THE SEUSSADON IS GONE IN AN INSTANT...
DRAGGED DOWN TO SOME STYGIAN PIT!
MREEEP!
I HAVE MY PRIZE... BUT I CANNOT REMEMBER WHY I...
SUDDENLY, AND MUCH TOO LATE, I RECOGNIZE THE MUFFLED ROAR...AN ISZ STAMPEDE!
DRAWN BY MY QUARRY'S CRIES, A THOUSAND MINDLESS, PANICKED ISZ TURN ON ME, SWIMMING FROM THE GROUND LIKE MOLES...
SPEARS!
ONE OF THE DEADFALLS SET BY SOME ANCIENT, UNKNOWN HAND THAT MAKES LIFE HERE SO DANGEROUS AND UNSTABLE!
THE SPOTTED SEUSSADON DIES INSTANTLY...
...BUT I SURVIVE...
...AND TRIUMPH!
MREEEP!


I WILL NOT BE TAKEN! I AM THE MAXX!
I AM...
THE WORLD... STARTING... TO CHANGE... TO FADE... MUST FIGHT IT...
MUST...
WHUMP!

NO!
SLICK
SLICK
SPLAT
SQUAWK
MEEP
MEEP
HACK
HACK
THEY ARE ALL DEAD! ALL! I HAVE KILLED ALL...
...UM...
I HAVE PENETRATED TO THE WET, SOFT, WHITE, SQUISHY, BE-TOOTHED HEART OF DARKNESS!
BUT WHY?

SOMETHING ABOUT THE LEOPARD QUEEN... A MAGICIAN...
AND A STRANGE, DIRTY LAND, FILLED WITH CITIES AND CRIME... CRIME ONLY I CAN FIGHT...
I CAN'T THINK ABOUT THESE FANTASIES NOW... I HAVE TO RUN...
AVOID THE NETS... AVOID THE SPEARS...
SPLAT!

DAMN!
THE NET WAS TOO FAST FOR ME! I FEEL MYSELF DRAGGED UNDER-GROUND, TO SOME DESPERATE FATE!
RIP
BUT I WILL BE FREE!
FOR I AM...
...THE...
CHUMP

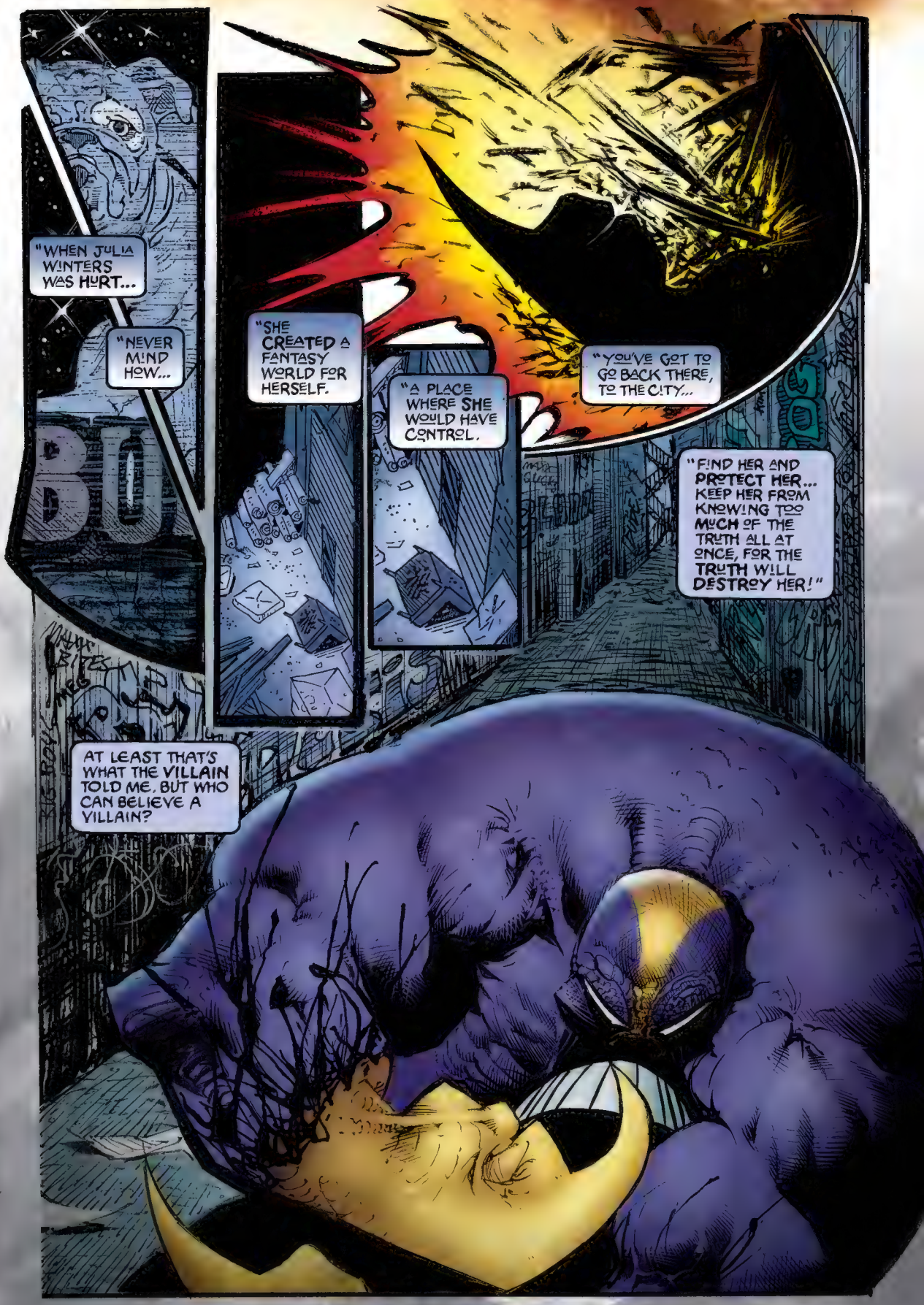
mommy!
NO!
I HATE WAKING UP TO SOMEONE ELSE'S NIGHT-MARE.
I ESPECIALLY HATE WAKING UP IN SOME-ONE ELSE'S BATHROOM.
AND WHAT'S EVEN WORSE, THIS BATHROOM HAS LEAKY PIPES!
DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP
DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP
I DON'T KNOW WHY I KNOW THIS IS A BATHROOM.
DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP
I AM THE KING OF THE WILDPLACES. I SHOULDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT PIPES AND GASKETS AND TRAPS AND VALVES... BUT I DO.
JUST LIKE I KNOW THAT DREAM WAS NOT MY DREAM!
IT BELONGED TO THE LEOPARD QUEEN, IN SOME WAY I CAN'T EXPLAIN.
MAYBE IF I CAN MAKE THIS LITTLE PUMP STOP DRIP-PING, I CAN THINK.
LESSEE, THE ROD GOES UP AND THE WATER STOPS...
THE ROD GOES DOWN AND...

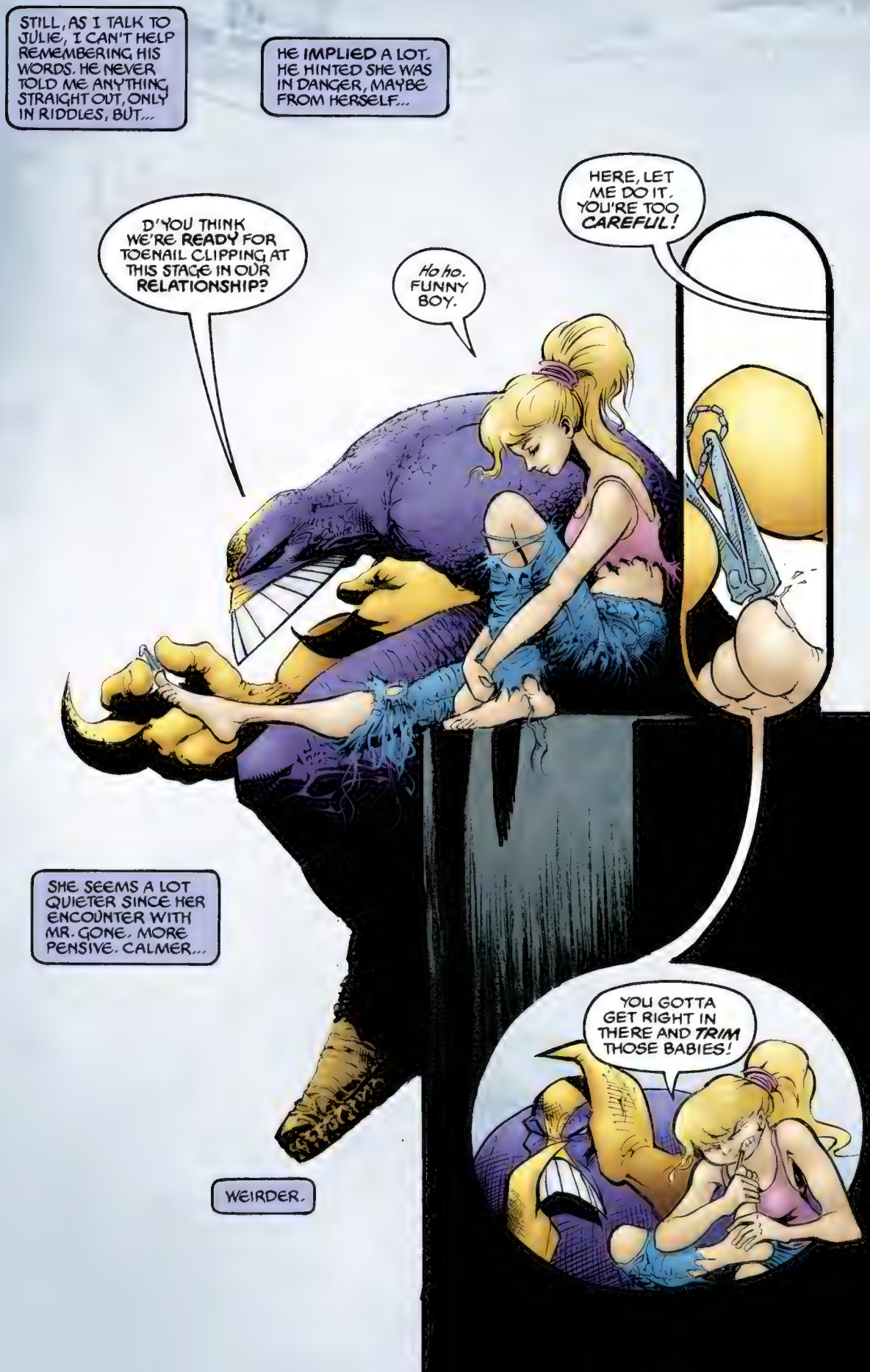
SPLOOSHH
VRUM!
A LITTLE CONFUSED BY THE MODERN TECHNOLOGY, EH, BR'ER LAPP!N?
BOO!
PRETTY NEAT MASK, RIGHT? I USE IT TO FRIGHTEN THE NATIVES AWAY FROM MY ISZ HARVESTING OPERATIONS.
I NOT ONLY NEED TO TRAP THOSE LITTLE BUGGERS, BUT ENOUGH LARGER ANIMALS TO KEEP THEM FED, AS WELL!
DON'T WORRY, IT'S ONLY ME, MR. GONE ... MAN OF TWO WORLDS, AND MASTER OF DISGUISE!
GIVE THIS TO JULIE WINTERS WHEN YOU SEE HER. AFTER MY ENCOUNTER WITH HER ON THE FIFTH ZONE, I MAY NOT HAVE A HEAD TO GO BACK TO!
WHAP!

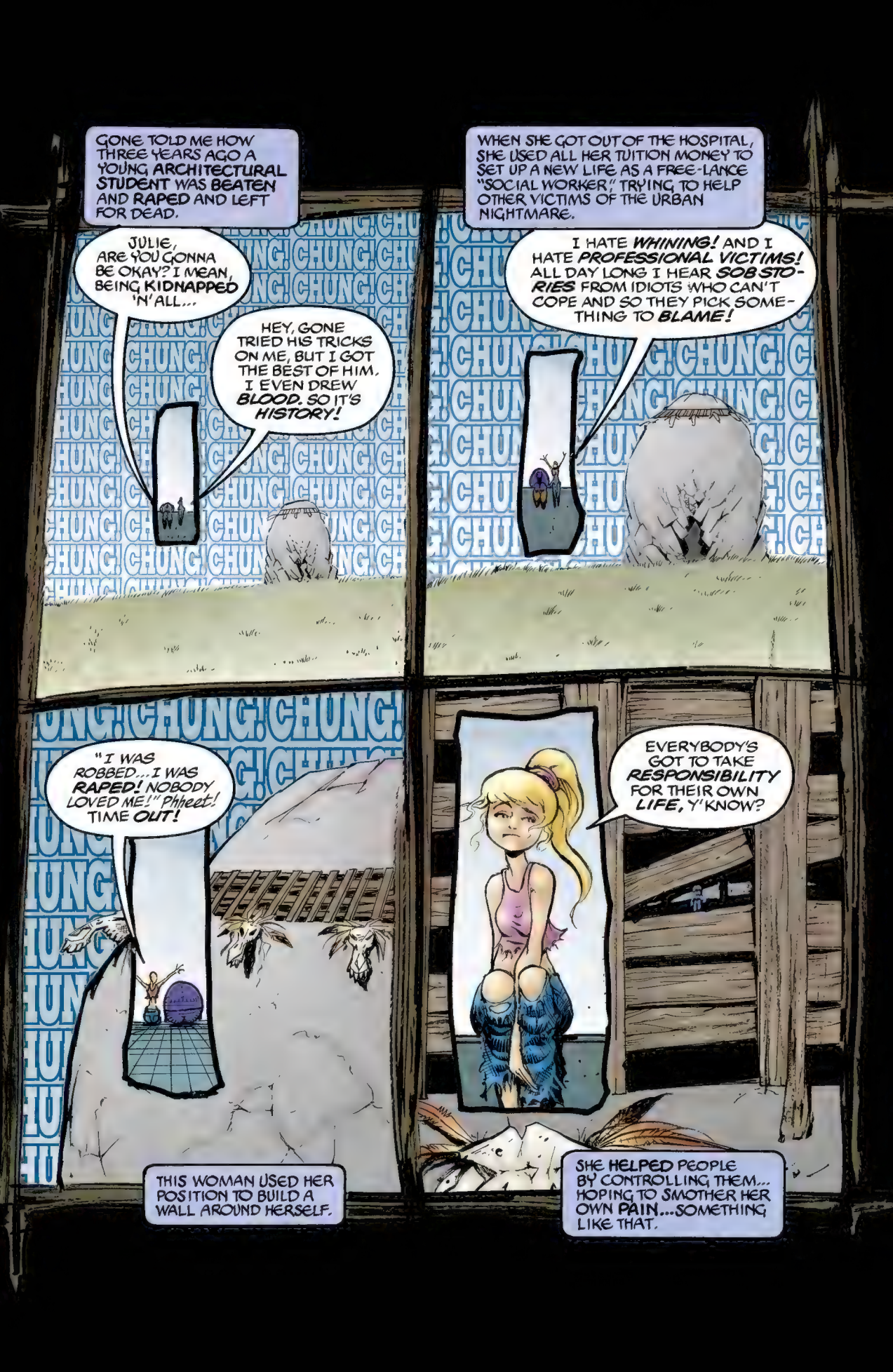
AHH, ANOTHER TUSSLE! GOOD FOR THE SOUL!
YOU REALLY DON'T REMEMBER OUR FIGHT BACK AT THE GAS STATION, DO YOU?
EAT DROPPINGS, PUCKWALLOW!
CRACK!
NAUGHTY, NAUGHTY, BR'ER LAPP!N! DO THEY TEACH YOU TO TALK L!KE THAT BACK AT THE WARREN?
MEAT-BREATH! ANT TEEKLER!
AND YOU'RE A LOT STRONGER ON TH!S S!DE! I'LL HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT!
HAIRLESS SUCKLING!

POP
MAXX! WE CAN'T WASTE OUR TIME LIKE THIS!
WHY NOT?
I FIGHT EVIL... AND YOU ARE EVIL!
NO, NO! THAT'S JUST IT! YOU'RE NO SUPERHERO! YOU'RE A PROTECTOR... JULIE WIN... I MEAN THE LEOPARD QUEEN'S PROTECTOR.
HUH?
POP
THE TWO OF YOU ARE SOUL-LINKED! WHAT SHE FEELS, YOU FEEL!
AND SHE IS LOST...
LOST IN THE CITY AND IN HER OWN MIND!
WHY SHOULD I BELIEVE YOU, VILE SORCERER?
MAXX
MAXX
MAXX
MAXX!
WHAT?
LET ME JUST CONVINCE YOU...
...WITH ONE WORD...
MOMMY.

YOU SEE, I KNOW ABOUT THE DREAM... ABOUT THE DOLL... ABOUT EVERYTHING!
I KNOW WHO YOU REALLY ARE...
WHO YOU WERE BEFORE YOU FOUND THE MASK LYING IN THE MUD...
AND WHAT YOU ARE NOW, BEHIND THE MASK, THOUGH YOU'VE BEEN TOO COWARDLY TO LOOK!
TELL ME.
MAYBE LATER. THE TRUTH ABOUT YOU IS ONLY EMBARRASSING ...JULIE'S TRUTH COULD DESTROY HER!
AND THIS... JULIE AND THE QUEEN OF THE LEOPARD WOMEN... ARE ONE?
YEP. MAN, THIS IS GONNA BE A LONG NIGHT!
THIS PRIMITIVE PLANE, WHICH YOU THINK IS AUSTRALIA AND I CALL PANGAEA, IS ALL THAT IS REAL...
THE OTHER WORLD IS A DREAM, WHERE WE ARE TRAPPED PLAYING OUT...
...OUR DEEPEST FANTASIES...

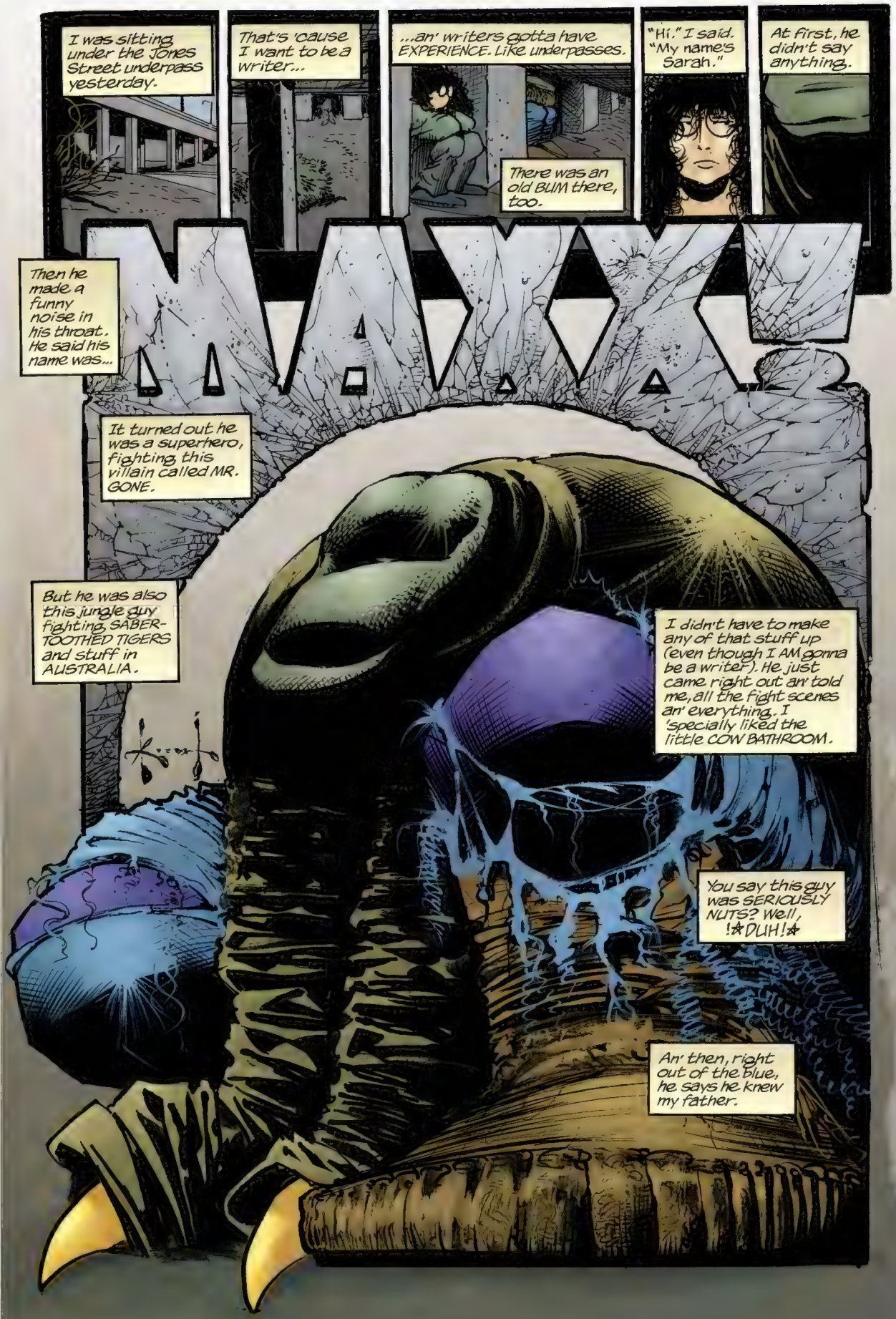

"WHEN JULIA WINTERS WAS HURT...
"NEVER MIND HOW...
"SHE CREATED A FANTASY WORLD FOR HERSELF.
"A PLACE WHERE SHE WOULD HAVE CONTROL.
"YOU'VE GOT TO GO BACK THERE, TO THE CITY...
"FIND HER AND PROTECT HER... KEEP HER FROM KNOWING TOO MUCH OF THE TRUTH ALL AT ONCE, FOR THE TRUTH WILL DESTROY HER!"
AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT THE VILLAIN TOLD ME, BUT WHO CAN BELIEVE A VILLAIN?

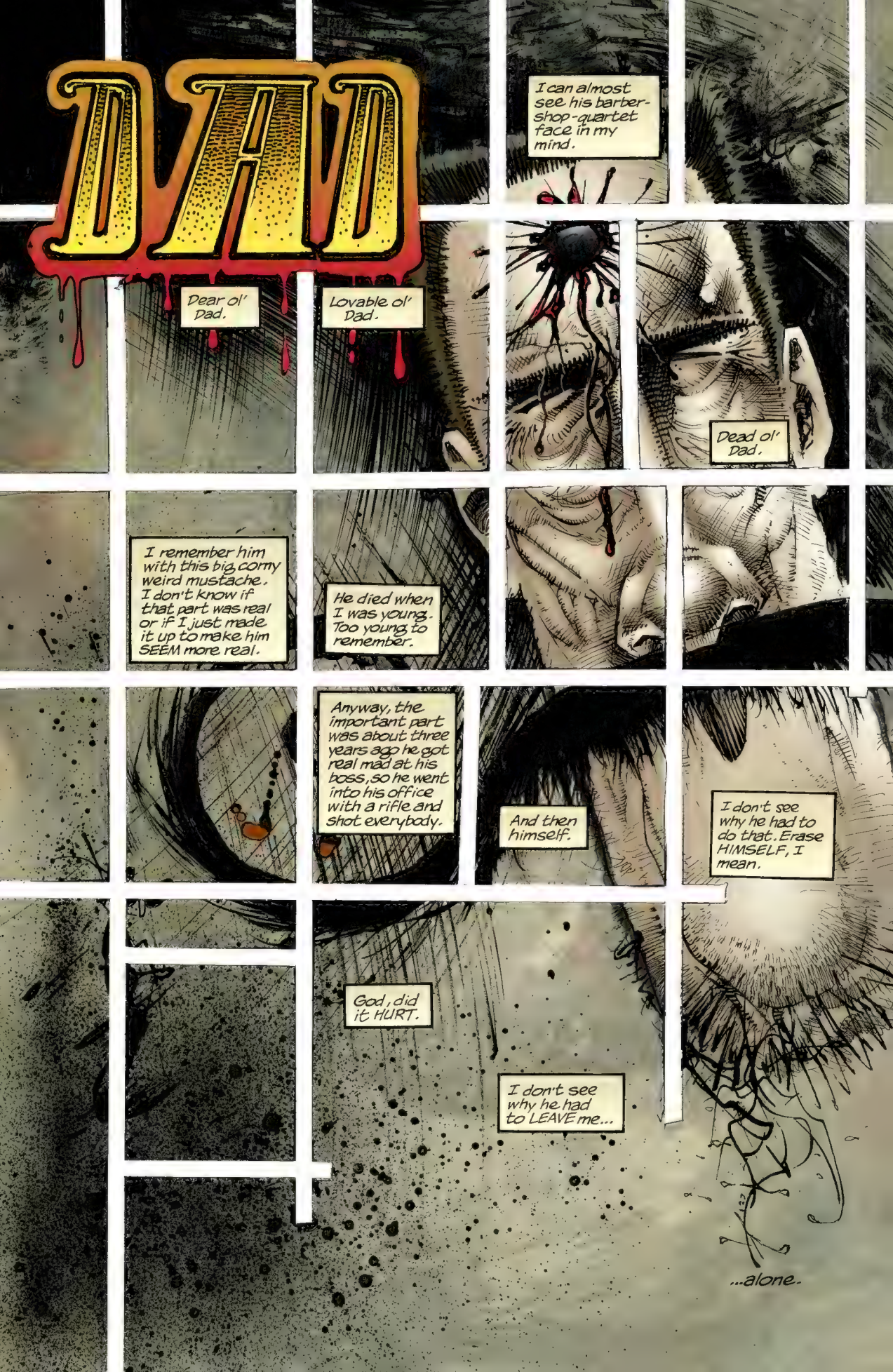

STILL, AS I TALK TO JULIE, I CAN'T HELP REMEMBERING HIS WORDS. HE NEVER TOLD ME ANYTHING STRAIGHT OUT, ONLY IN RIDDLES, BUT...
HE IMPLIED A LOT. HE HINTED SHE WAS IN DANGER, MAYBE FROM HERSELF...
D'YOU THINK WE'RE READY FOR TOENAIL CLIPPING AT THIS STAGE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP?
Ho ho. FUNNY BOY.
HERE, LET ME DO IT. YOU'RE TOO CAREFUL!
SHE SEEMS A LOT QUIETER SINCE HER ENCOUNTER WITH MR. GONE. MORE PENSIVE. CALMER...
WEIRDER.
YOU GOTTA GET RIGHT IN THERE AND TRIM THOSE BABIES!

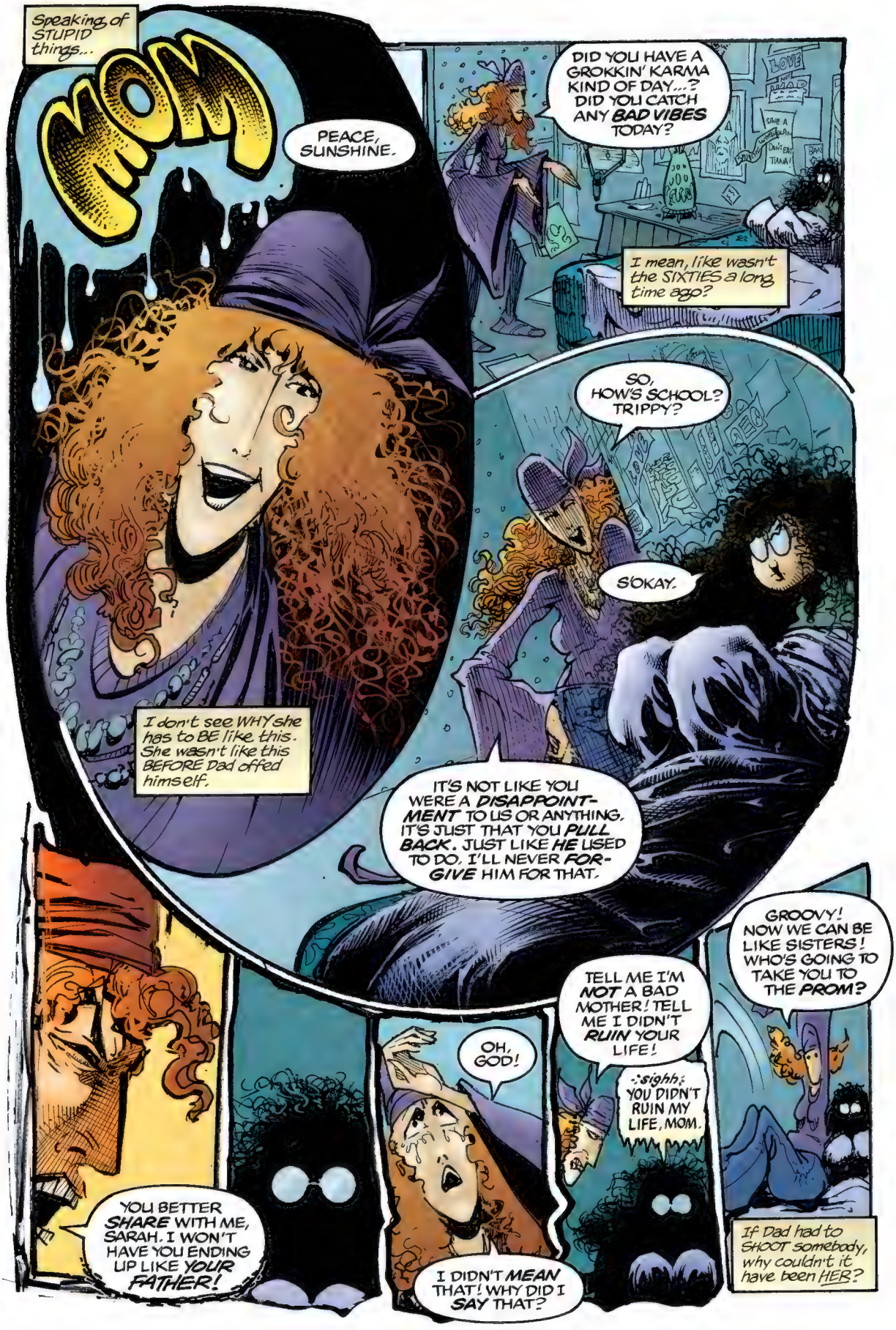

GONE TOLD ME HOW THREE YEARS AGO A YOUNG ARCHITECTURAL STUDENT WAS BEATEN AND RAPED AND LEFT FOR DEAD.
JULIE, ARE YOU GONNA BE OKAY? I MEAN, BEING KIDNAPPED 'N' ALL...
HEY, GONE TRIED HIS TRICKS ON ME, BUT I GOT THE BEST OF HIM. I EVEN DREW BLOOD. SO IT'S HISTORY!
WHEN SHE GOT OUT OF THE HOSPITAL, SHE USED ALL HER TUITION MONEY TO SET UP A NEW LIFE AS A FREE-LANCE "SOCIAL WORKER", TRYING TO HELP OTHER VICTIMS OF THE URBAN NIGHTMARE.
I HATE WHINING! AND I HATE PROFESSIONAL VICTIMS! ALL DAY LONG I HEAR SOB STORIES FROM IDIOTS WHO CAN'T COPE AND SO THEY PICK SOMETHING TO BLAME!
"I WAS ROBBED... I WAS RAPED! NOBODY LOVED ME!" Phheet! TIME OUT!
THIS WOMAN USED HER POSITION TO BUILD A WALL AROUND HERSELF.
EVERYBODY'S GOT TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN LIFE, Y'KNOW?
SHE HELPED PEOPLE BY CONTROLLING THEM... HOPING TO SMOTHER HER OWN PAIN...SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

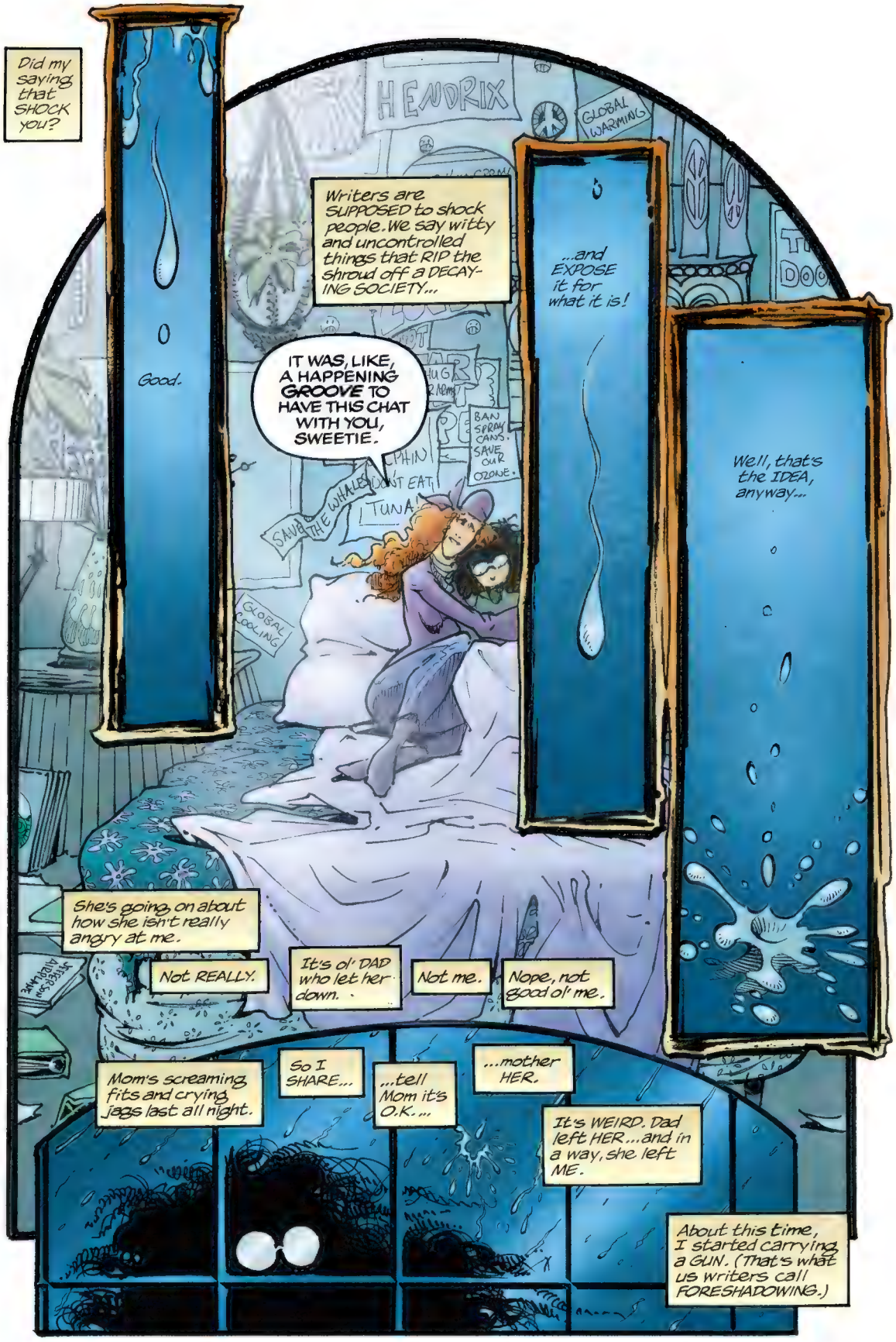
AND SOMEWHERE IN THE WILD LAND, IN THE LAND OF DREAMS, IN PANGAEA... HER BETTER SELF WAS IMPRISONED, BY HER OWN SELF-LOATHING.
I DUNNO, SEEMS LIKE IF SOMEBODY'S RAPED, IT'S NOT LIKE A TEST YOU FAILED OR A JOB WHERE YOU GET FIRED...
IT'S SOMEBODY ELSE'S GUILT FOR ONCE! YOU GET TO HAVE YOUR OWN ANGER AND...
AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT GONE TOLD ME. I DON'T KNOW IF I BELIEVED ANYTHING HE SAID, LEAST OF ALL ABOUT JULIE.
HEY, MAXX, SAVE THE LIBERAL-FEMINIST GARBAGE FOR SOMEONE WHO CARES, 'KAY?
SORRY. I KNOW YOU'RE JUST TRYING TO WATCH OUT FOR ME, LIKE YOU ALWAYS DO. BUT IT'S OVER NOW. I CUT THE BASTARD. YOU CHASED HIM BACK TO GOD-KNOWS-WHERE. IT'S OVER.
AND I'M GOING T'BE JUST FINE.
IN FACT, I WAS ALREADY HAVING TROUBLE REMEMBERING THE DETAILS OF WHAT HE SAID. IT WAS LIKE A DREAM.
A REALLY BAD DREAM.
NEXT MONTH
THE LAND BITES!

Chapter Four


I was sitting under the Jones Street underpass yesterday.
That's 'cause I want to be a writer...
...an' writers gotta have EXPERIENCE. Like underpasses.
There was an old BUM there, too.
"Hi." I said. "My name's Sarah."
At first, he didn't say anything.
Then he made a funny noise in his throat. He said his name was...
It turned out he was a superhero, fighting this villain called MR. GONE.
But he was also this jungle guy fighting SABER-TOOTHED TIGERS and stuff in AUSTRALIA.
I didn't have to make any of that stuff up (even though I AM gonna be a writer). He just came right out an' told me, all the fight scenes an' everything. I 'specially liked the little COW BATHROOM.
You say this guy was SERIOUSLY NUTS? Well, !☆DUH!☆
An' then, right out of the blue, he says he knew my father.


DAD
Dear ol' Dad.
Lovable ol' Dad.
I can almost see his barber-shop-quartet face in my mind.
Dead ol' Dad.
I remember him with this big, corny weird mustache. I don't know if that part was real or if I just made it up to make him SEEM more real.
He died when I was young. Too young to remember.
Anyway, the important part was about three years ago he got real mad at his boss, so he went into his office with a rifle and shot everybody.
And then himself.
I don't see why he had to do that. Erase HIMSELF, I mean.
God, did it HURT.
I don't see why he had to LEAVE me...
...alone.


Speaking of STUPID things...
MOM
PEACE, SUNSHINE.
DID YOU HAVE A GROKKIN' KARMA KIND OF DAY...? DID YOU CATCH ANY BAD VIBES TODAY?
I mean, like wasn't the SIXTIES a long time ago?
SO, HOW'S SCHOOL? TRIPPY?
SOKAY.
I don't see WHY she has to BE like this. She wasn't like this BEFORE Dad offed himself.
IT'S NOT LIKE YOU WERE A DISAPPOINTMENT TO US OR ANYTHING, IT'S JUST THAT YOU PULL BACK. JUST LIKE HE USED TO DO. I'LL NEVER FORGIVE HIM FOR THAT.
GROOVY! NOW WE CAN BE LIKE SISTERS! WHO'S GOING TO TAKE YOU TO THE PROM?
TELL ME I'M NOT A BAD MOTHER! TELL ME I DIDN'T RUIN YOUR LIFE!
:sighh: YOU DIDN'T RUIN MY LIFE, MOM.
OH, GOD!
If Dad had to SHOOT somebody, why couldn't it have been HER?
YOU BETTER SHARE WITH ME, SARAH. I WON'T HAVE YOU ENDING UP LIKE YOUR FATHER!
I DIDN'T MEAN THAT! WHY DID I SAY THAT?


Did my saying that SHOCK you?
Good.
Writers are SUPPOSED to shock people. We say witty and uncontrolled things that RIP the shroud off a DECAYING SOCIETY...
IT WAS, LIKE, A HAPPENING GROOVE TO HAVE THIS CHAT WITH YOU, SWEETIE.
...and EXPOSE it for what it is!
Well, that's the IDEA, anyway...
HENDRIX
GLOBAL WARMING
BAN SPRAY CANS. SAVE OUR OZONE.
SAVE THE WHALES
TUNA
GLOBAL COOLING
She's going on about how she isn't really angry at me.
Not REALLY.
It's ol' DAD who let her down.
Not me.
Nope, not good ol' me.
Mom's screaming fits and crying jags last all night.
So I SHARE...
...tell Mom it's O.K....
...mother HER.
It's WEIRD. Dad left HER...and in a way, she left ME.
About this time, I started carrying a GUN. (That's what us writers call FORESHADOWING.)

But first I have to tell you about...
JIMMY
Jimmy is cool.
He beats up littler kids and takes their lunch money. I think that's kind of cool. No matter how low you are in the FOOD CHAIN, there's always somebody LOWER.
I think WE'RE all either ONE of us can get.
Besides, we HATE everybody else. They're all NECRO-NERDS. SAND-FREAKS.
Jimmy is short like me. He doesn't have friends -- like me.
HOME WORK
They have tattoos and stuff saying how ROMANTIC death is. But Jimmy knows the TRUTH -- like me.
Death is hard an' cold an' UGLY.
Not some cute chick!
This is a story Jimmy told me.
I'm putting it down just like he said it, 'cause reproducing HUMAN SPEECH is a talent every writer should have.
ME AND FREEM WAS SKRAGGING THIS CAR ON EIGHTH. WE FIGURED WE'D CRUISE AROUND IN IT FOR THE NIGHT AN' THEN DITCH IT.
IT WAS MY JOB T' BOINK THE STARTER...
"...BUT I FORGOT 'BOUT MY SCREW-DRIVER WHEN I GOT IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT.
RRIPP!

"FINALLY, WE PULLED OUT...

SSSCREECHH!!!

"AN' THEN THIS OLD RATTLETRAP CUT US OFF!

SMASH!

OH, NO!

"CARJACKERS!

"THE GOLDARN *SCUZZBALLS* WANTED T'*STEAL* OUR *STOLEN CAR!*

"WELL, THAT P.O.'ED US *PLENTY!* WE BEGAN TO FIGHT BACK!

"THEN FREEM, THAT WUSS, BAILED ON ME!

"I WAS *ALONE.*

"AN' THAT DADBLAMED *SPRING* WOULDN'T LET GO!

"I WAS *DEAD.*

TAP TAP TAP

"DEAD.

"...

SLAM!

"I STARTED TO *REALLY* FIGHT THEN.

THUMP

"I BIT OFF ONE GUY'S *THUMB.*

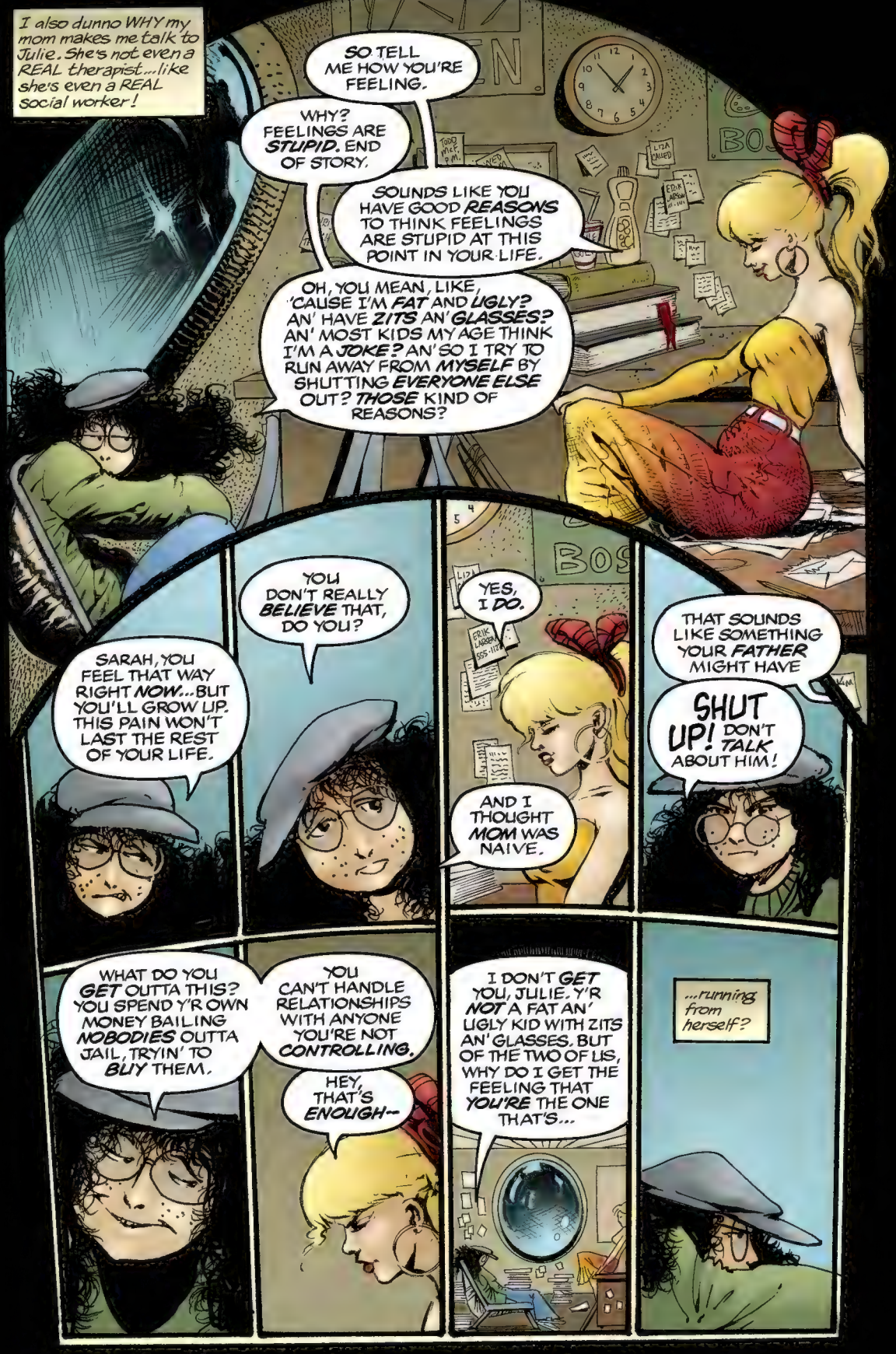
"ANOTHER GUY, I *CRACKED* HIS RIB LIKE A PENCIL.

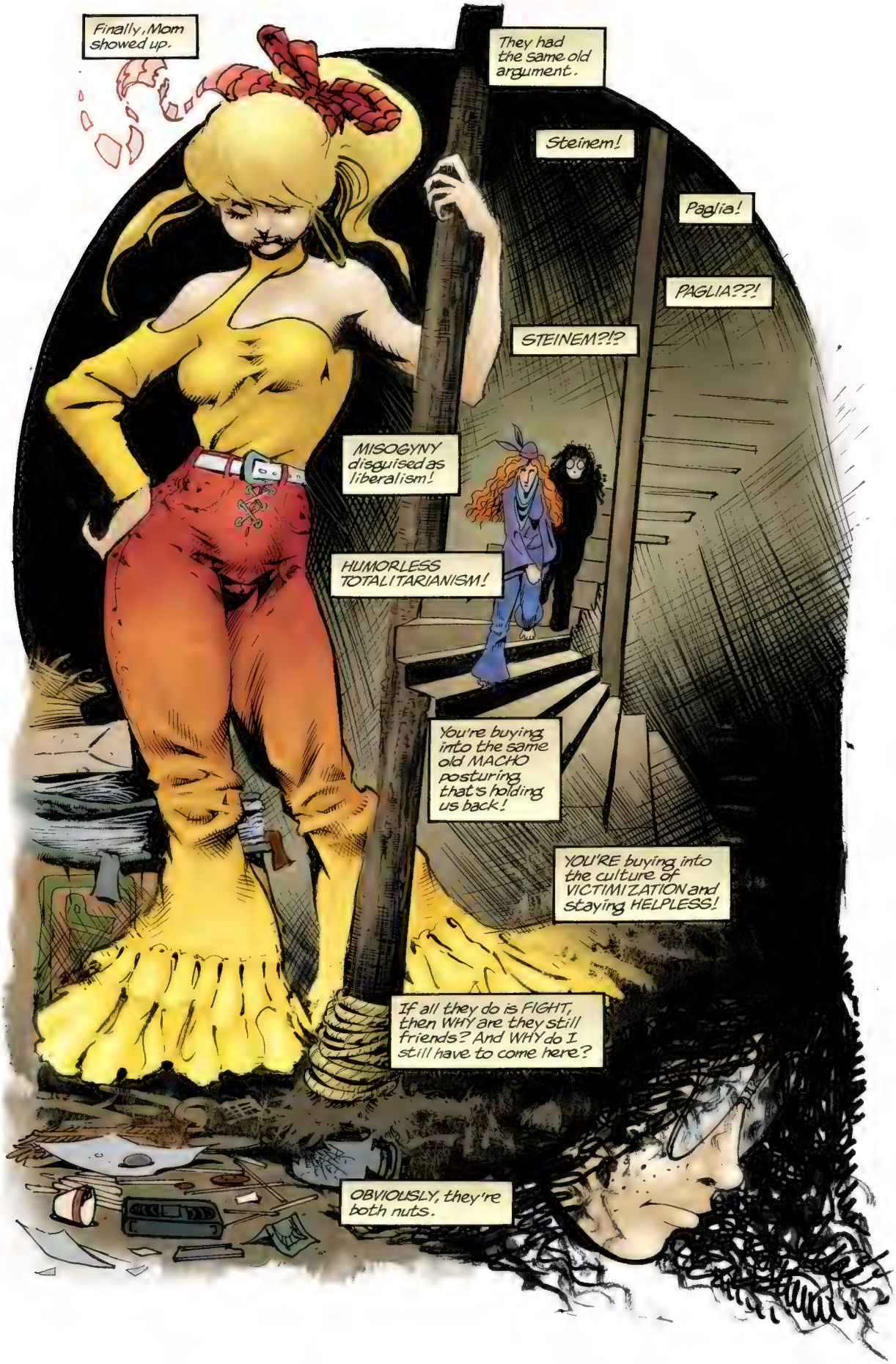
"THEY WERE CRYIN', *SCREAMIN'* FOR MERCY.

"I ONLY LAUGHED.

"THEY NEVER HADDA *CHANCE!*"

Wasn't that a cool story?
Now, this is the chapter about...
MISS JULIE
She's an old friend of my mother's. I think they went to school together or something. She does this SOCIAL WORKER thing out of her apartment. Very weird.
...I SAID I'D HAVE THE MONEY, MR. BRUNO. I JUST NEED A LITTLE MORE TIME PUTTING IT TOGETHER. YOU DON'T HAVE TO EVICT THEM TODAY, DO YOU?
UHHN...
OH, YOU DO, YES, I'M SURE THAT RAT-INFESTED HOVEL IS BEING EAGERLY SOLICITED BY OTHER DESPERATE SINGLE MOTHERS, BUT DO YOU THINK YOU COULD BEAT BACK THE HORDES FOR ONE DAY, WHILE...?
Ah...?
YES, I DO REALIZE THAT YOU ARE LORD KING GOD OF THE UNIVERSE IN YOUR BUILDING, BUT PERHAPS IF I COULD SEE MY WAY TO SWEETEN THE RENT WITH ANOTHER FIFTY...? YOU WILL? YOU'RE A PRINCE AS ALWAYS, MR. BRUNO.
THOSE FUNKY 70
HI, SARAH. YOUR MOM TELLS ME YOU'RE STILL HAVING... TROUBLE.
SHE SAYS YOU BROOD A LOT. YOU SEEM TO LIVE IN THE PAST.
QUEEN
NO TROUBLE. I'M FINE. HE'S GONE.
THIS FROM THE LIVING FOSSIL. LIKE SHE KNOWS WHAT'S R'LLY GOING ON...
I FOUND ONE OF MY DAD'S GUNS LAST WEEK.
IT MADE ME FEEL GLAD TO TOUCH IT. LIKE I WAS NEAR HIM.
SHE KNOWS SHE LOVES YOU, SARAH.
I didn't tell her I've been CARRYING it in my coat pocket. I dunno WHY.


I also dunno WHY my mom makes me talk to Julie. She's not even a REAL therapist...like she's even a REAL social worker!
SO TELL ME HOW YOU'RE FEELING.
WHY? FEELINGS ARE STUPID. END OF STORY.
SOUNDS LIKE YOU HAVE GOOD REASONS TO THINK FEELINGS ARE STUPID AT THIS POINT IN YOUR LIFE.
OH, YOU MEAN, LIKE, 'CAUSE I'M FAT AND UGLY? AN' HAVE ZITS AN' GLASSES? AN' MOST KIDS MY AGE THINK I'M A JOKE? AN' SO I TRY TO RUN AWAY FROM MYSELF BY SHUTTING EVERYONE ELSE OUT? THOSE KIND OF REASONS?
YOU DON'T REALLY BELIEVE THAT, DO YOU?
SARAH, YOU FEEL THAT WAY RIGHT NOW...BUT YOU'LL GROW UP. THIS PAIN WON'T LAST THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.
YES, I DO.
AND I THOUGHT MOM WAS NAIVE.
THAT SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING YOUR FATHER MIGHT HAVE
SHUT UP! DON'T TALK ABOUT HIM!
WHAT DO YOU GET OUTTA THIS? YOU SPEND Y'R OWN MONEY BAILING NOBODIES OUTTA JAIL, TRYIN' TO BUY THEM.
YOU CAN'T HANDLE RELATIONSHIPS WITH ANYONE YOU'RE NOT CONTROLLING.
HEY, THAT'S ENOUGH--
I DON'T GET YOU, JULIE. Y'R NOT A FAT AN' UGLY KID WITH ZITS AN' GLASSES. BUT OF THE TWO OF US, WHY DO I GET THE FEELING THAT YOU'RE THE ONE THAT'S...
...running from herself?


Finally, Mom showed up.
They had the same old argument.
Steinem!
Paglia!
PAGLIA??!
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You're buying into the same old MACHO posturing that's holding us back!
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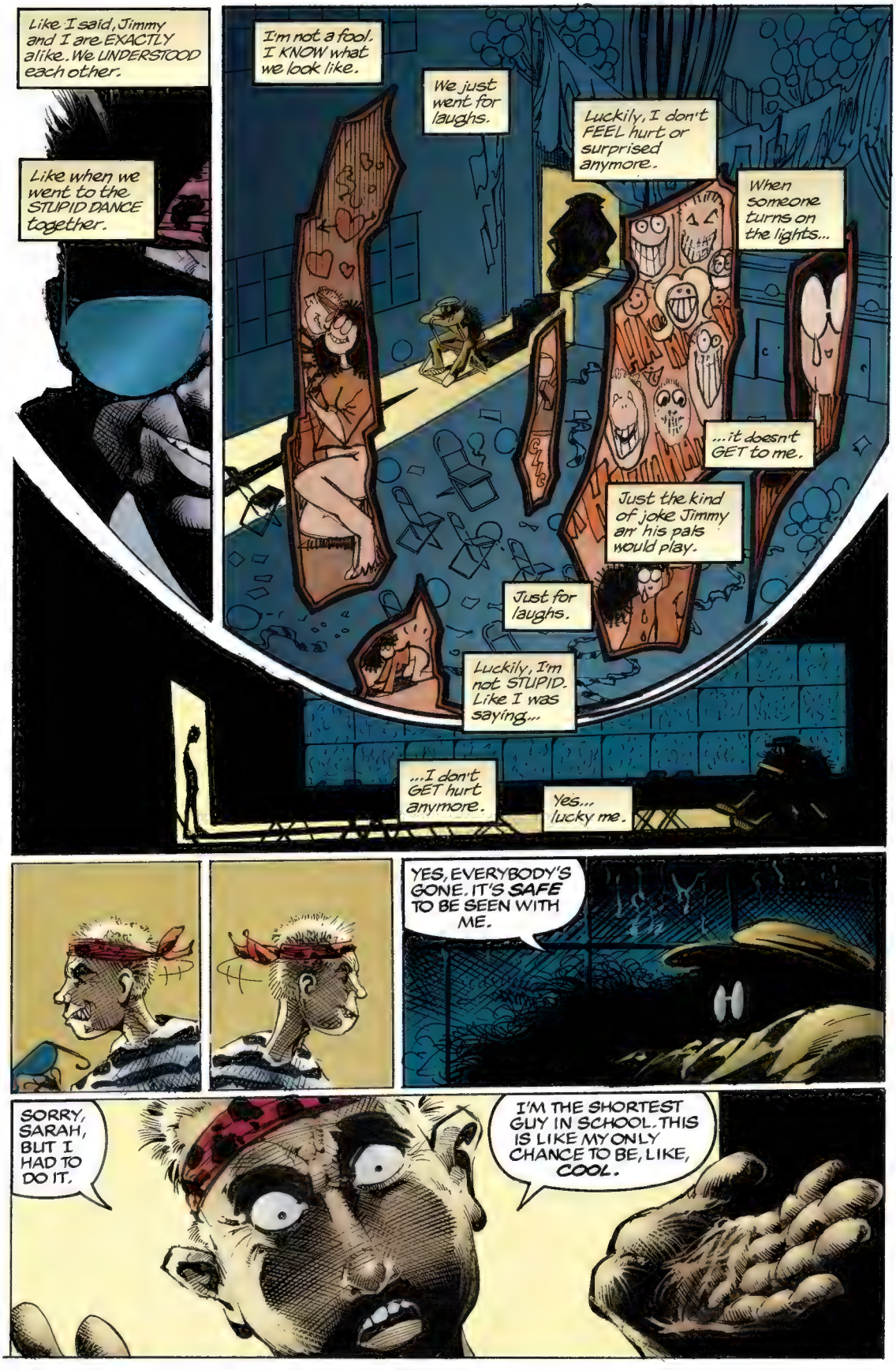
If all they do is FIGHT, then WHY are they still friends? And WHY do I still have to come here?
OBVIOUSLY, they're both nuts.


Like I said, Jimmy and I are EXACTLY alike. We UNDERSTOOD each other.
Like when we went to the STUPID DANCE together.
I'm not a fool. I KNOW what we look like.
We just went for laughs.
Luckily, I don't FEEL hurt or surprised anymore.
When someone turns on the lights...
...it doesn't GET to me.
Just the kind of joke Jimmy an' his pals would play.
Just for laughs.
Luckily, I'm not STUPID. Like I was saying...
...I don't GET hurt anymore.
Yes... lucky me.
YES, EVERYBODY'S GONE. IT'S SAFE TO BE SEEN WITH ME.
SORRY, SARAH, BUT I HAD TO DO IT.
I'M THE SHORTEST GUY IN SCHOOL. THIS IS LIKE MY ONLY CHANCE TO BE, LIKE, COOL.

SEE, WE WERE TOGETHER 'CAUSE **NOBODY ELSE** LIKED US. BUT NOW **EVERYBODY** WILL LIKE ME.

I KNOW IT'S **STUPID** TO GIVE UP **YOU** FOR EVERY-BODY ELSE...

...BUT I JUST CAN'T **HELP** IT.

BESIDES, WE WERE JUST HAVIN' A LAUGH ...RIGHT?

NOBODY **REALLY** GOT HURT... RIGHT?

I could feel the gun in my pocket. But even more I could feel the SWEET, HOT HATRED my dad must've felt.

YOU UNDERSTAND, DON'T YOU, SARAH?

I UNDERSTAND.

YOU AREN'T MAD, RIGHT? 'CAUSE WE C'N STILL BE FRIENDS AN' STUFF, AS LONG AS NOBODY SEES US.

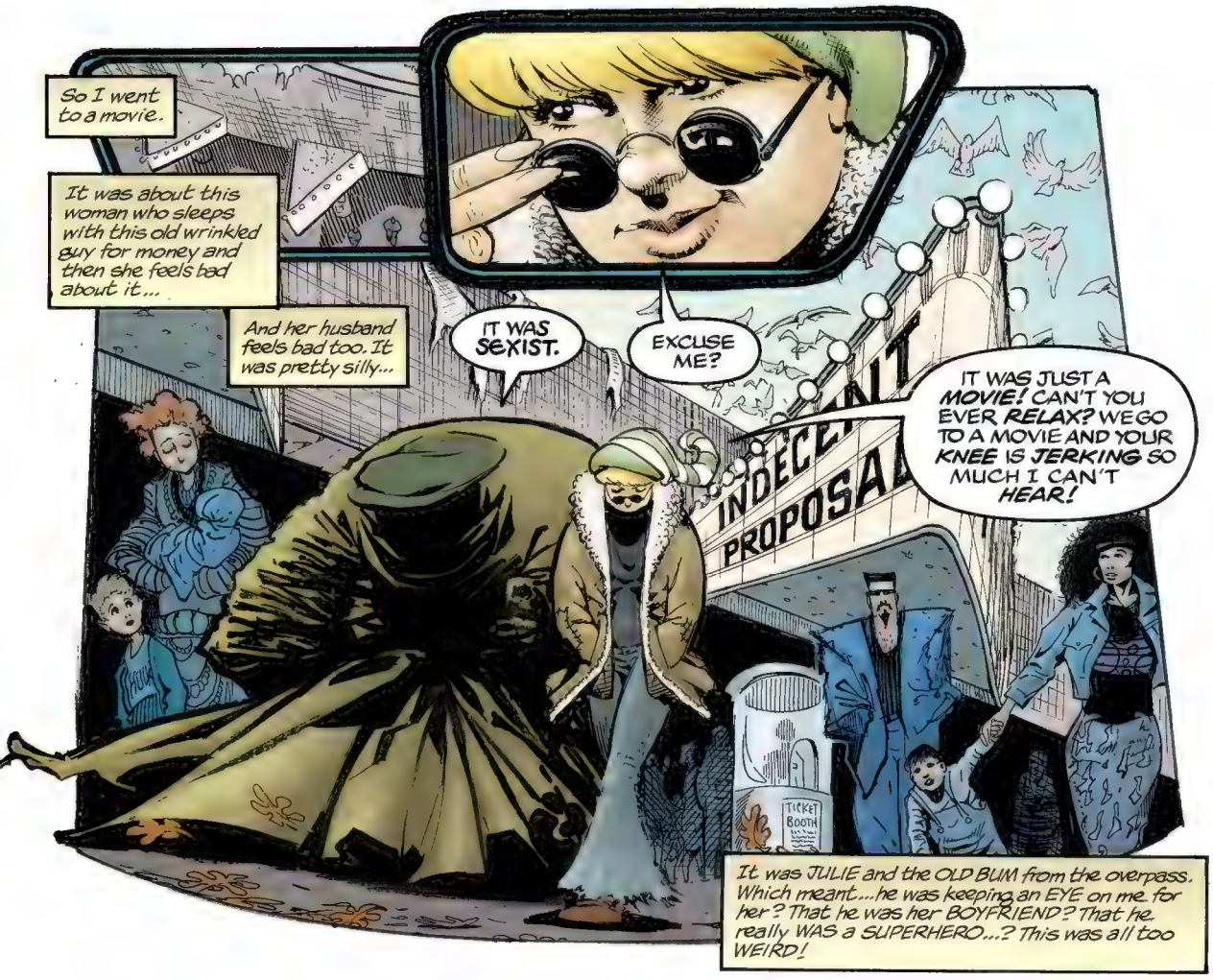
I'M NOT MAD, JIMMY.

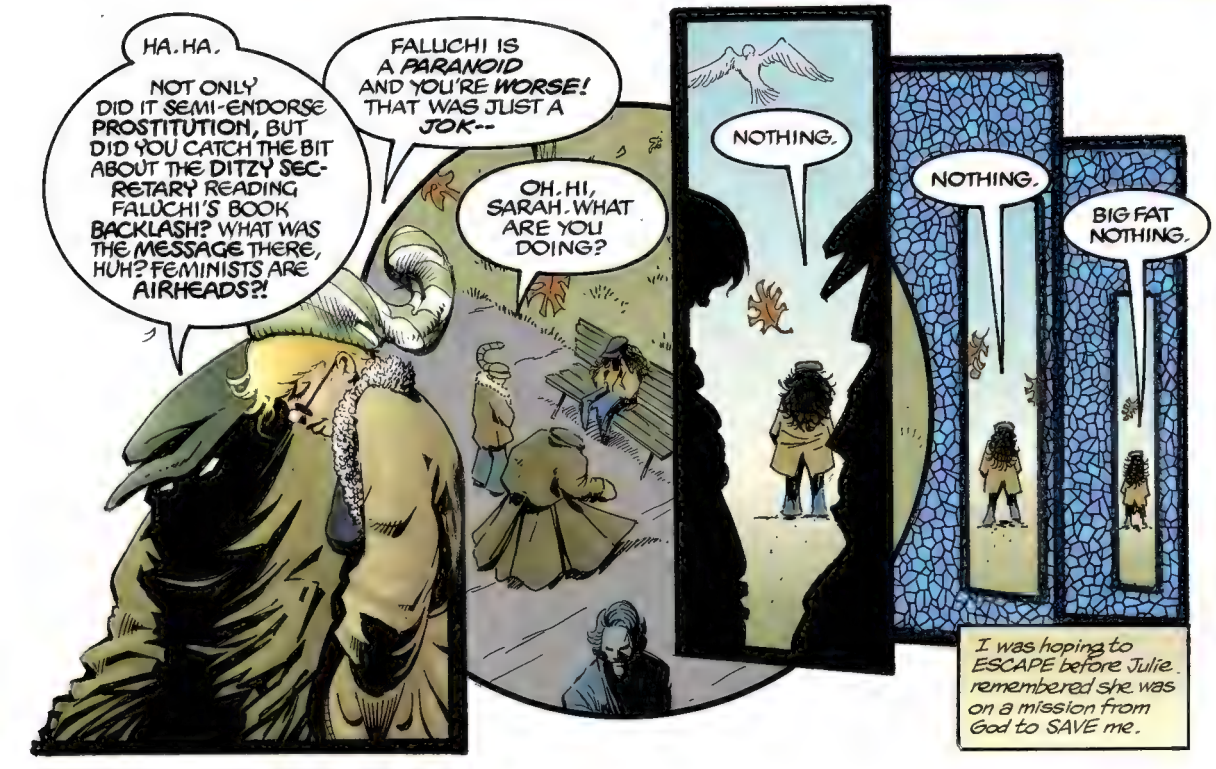
And the funny thing was...

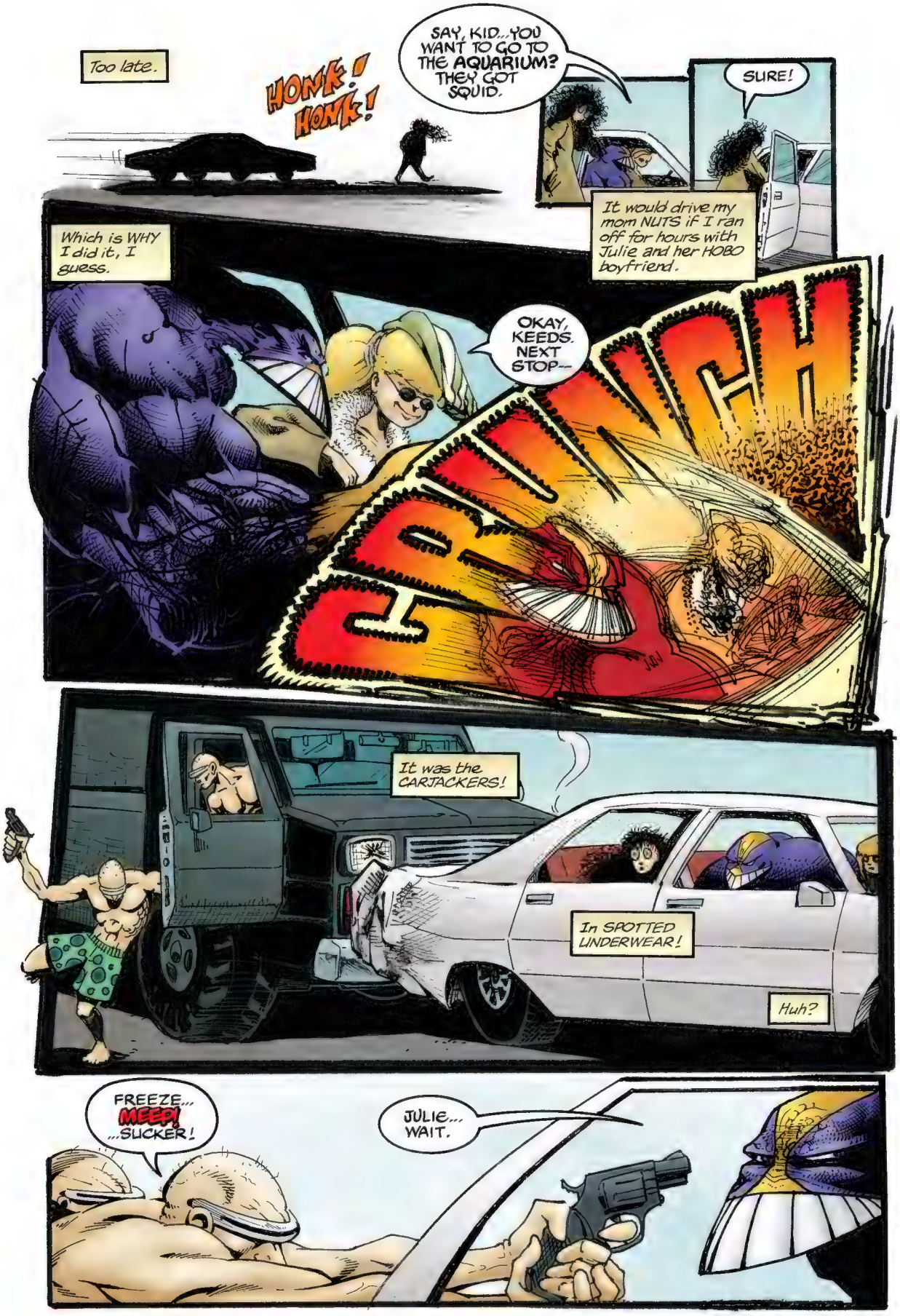
...that wasn't a lie.

I wasn't mad. Because in that second I realized that if they had come to ME rather than him, I would've done the same thing.

I think it's an important thing for a writer to know... that she has the potential to be as ROTTEN as everybody else.


So I went to a movie.
It was about this woman who sleeps with this old wrinkled guy for money and then she feels bad about it...
And her husband feels bad too. It was pretty silly...
IT WAS SEXIST.
EXCUSE ME?
IT WAS JUST A MOVIE! CAN'T YOU EVER RELAX? WE GO TO A MOVIE AND YOUR KNEE IS JERKING SO MUCH I CAN'T HEAR!
INDECENT PROPOSAL
TICKET BOOTH
It was JULIE and the OLD BUM from the overpass. Which meant...he was keeping an EYE on me for her? That he was her BOYFRIEND? That he really WAS a SUPERHERO...? This was all too WEIRD!


HA. HA.
NOT ONLY DID IT SEMI-ENDORSE PROSTITUTION, BUT DID YOU CATCH THE BIT ABOUT THE DITZY SECRETARY READING FALUCHI'S BOOK BACKLASH? WHAT WAS THE MESSAGE THERE, HUH? FEMINISTS ARE AIRHEADS?!
FALUCHI IS A PARANOID AND YOU'RE WORSE! THAT WAS JUST A JOK--
OH. HI, SARAH. WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
NOTHING.
NOTHING.
BIG FAT NOTHING.
I was hoping to ESCAPE before Julie remembered she was on a mission from God to SAVE me.

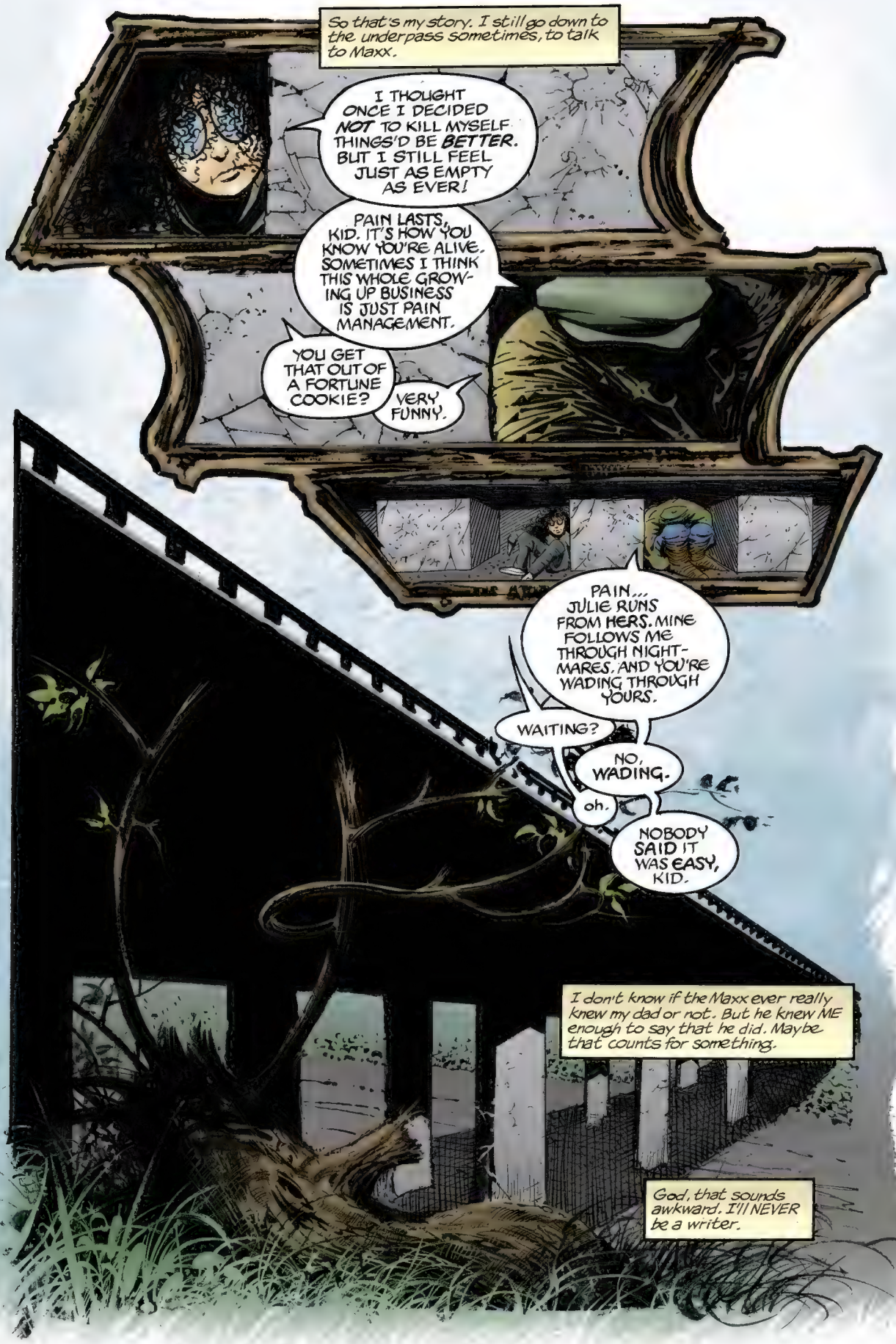

Too late.
HONK! HONK!
SAY, KID... YOU WANT TO GO TO THE AQUARIUM? THEY GOT SQUID.
SURE!
It would drive my mom NUTS if I ran off for hours with Julie and her HOBO boyfriend.
Which is WHY I did it, I guess.
OKAY, KEEDS. NEXT STOP--
CRUNCH
It was the CARJACKERS!
In SPOTTED UNDERWEAR!
Huh?
FREEZE... MEEP! ...SUCKER!
JULIE... WAIT.

...SOMETHING'S WRONG.
Uh-oh. I knew that look in his eyes. He was SEEING THINGS again.
Maybe he'd do something stupid...
Like grab their guns...
Maybe he thought those guys were little blue men or something...
Or pull them into the car...
CRUNCH!
WHUP!
Or something...

This was a lot different than the STORY Jimmy told me about fighting the CARJACKERS. That was COOL.
THIS was UGLY...
...people getting HANDS CRUSHED right before my eyes!
Ripped open from KNEES to STERNUM!
Their heads POPPED like GRAPEFRUITS!
It made me feel SICK, even if...
...it did make a sort of EXCITING climax to the story.

One of them even bounced off a wall like a rubber ball, like a CARTOON character and came screaming through the air, grinning like a shark, straight at MAXX!
SPUNK!
But he missed.
And when he died, he didn't even look HUMAN at all.
I think it was then that I, SARAH JAMES, lost it.
STOP!
SARAH...? PUT THE GUN DOWN, SARAH.
NO! NOTHING MAKES ANY SENSE!
AND IF IT MAKES ANY SENSE, THEN IT'S ALL GOTTA STOP!
CLICK!

I remember thinking... "See, I AM just like you, Daddy. I'm gonna see you, Daddy!"
THERE'S NOBODY IN CHARGE!
ADULTS RUN EVERYTHING AND NOTHING WORKS!
I HAVE NO CONTROL, AND UNLIKE YOU, JULIE... I AM SICK OF RUNNING FROM MYSELF!
I'M GONNA DO IT!
Okay. Here's the point in the story where I throw the gun away an' I have this cathartic revelation that suicide's WRONG, that life's worth living, everything's O.K.... you know, all that crap.
And that's why this story doesn't work.
'Cause I just don't BUY it.
CLUMP!
NOBODY BUYS IT. THAT'S NOT WHY YOU SHOULD GO ON.
WHY, THEN?
BECAUSE THINGS'LL CHANGE. YOU'LL CHANGE.
WHAT ABOUT RIGHT NOW?
RIGHT NOW... YOU WAIT.


So that's my story. I still go down to the underpass sometimes, to talk to Maxx.
I THOUGHT ONCE I DECIDED NOT TO KILL MYSELF THINGS'D BE BETTER. BUT I STILL FEEL JUST AS EMPTY AS EVER!
PAIN LASTS, KID. IT'S HOW YOU KNOW YOU'RE ALIVE. SOMETIMES I THINK THIS WHOLE GROWING UP BUSINESS IS JUST PAIN MANAGEMENT.
YOU GET THAT OUT OF A FORTUNE COOKIE?
VERY FUNNY.
PAIN... JULIE RUNS FROM HERS. MINE FOLLOWS ME THROUGH NIGHTMARES. AND YOU'RE WADING THROUGH YOURS.
WAITING?
NO, WADING.
oh.
NOBODY SAID IT WAS EASY, KID.
I don't know if the Maxx ever really knew my dad or not. But he knew ME enough to say that he did. Maybe that counts for something.
God, that sounds awkward. I'll NEVER be a writer.

Art Gallery by Sam Kieth

THE MAXX
1
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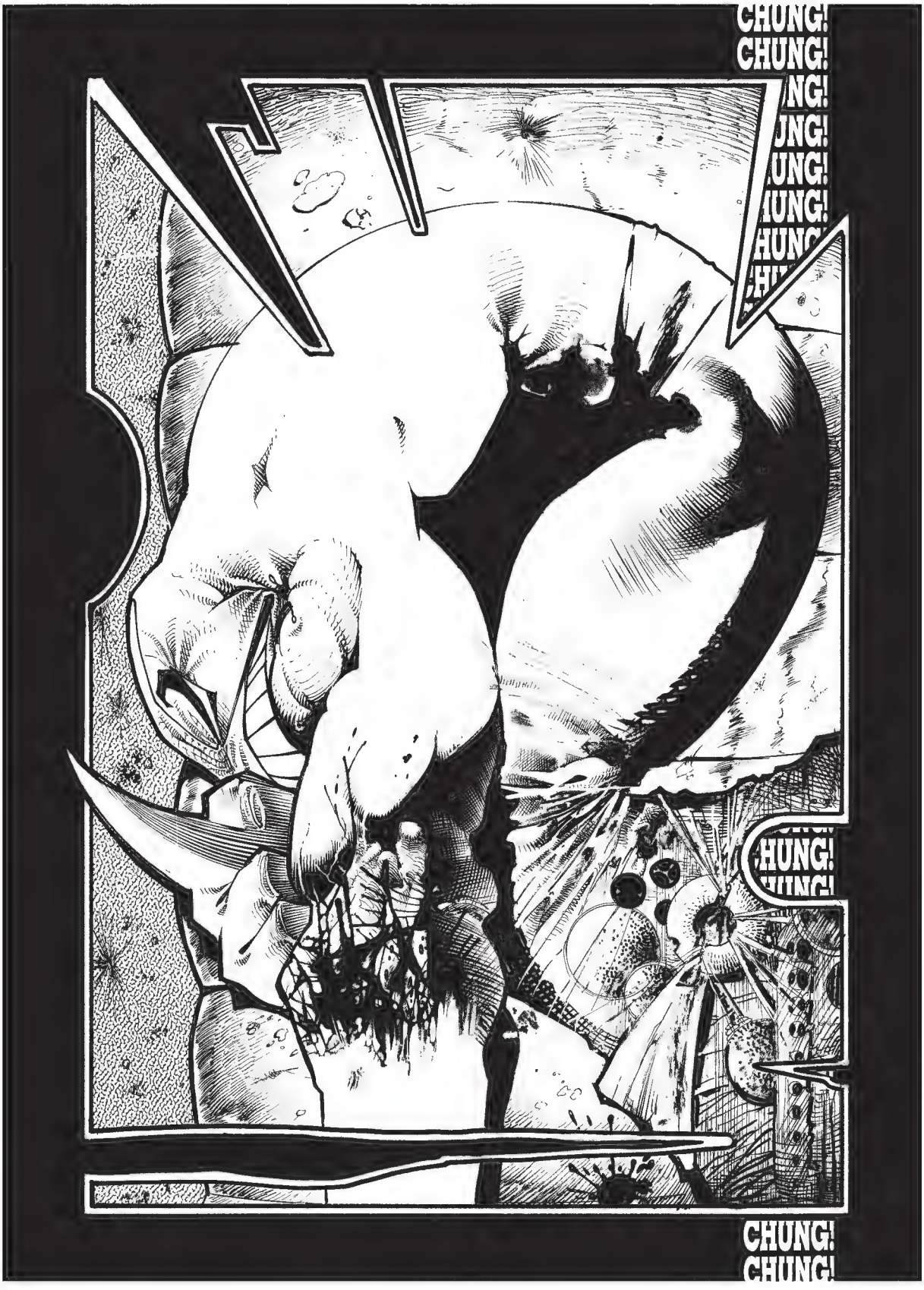
$1.95
$2.45
CANADA

THE
MASK

THE
MAXX

THE
MASK

THE MAXX
VITO
HERE I SIT
ALL BROKEN
HEARTED TRIED


CHUNG!
CHUNG!
CHUNG!

...I'M GONNA BRUSH AND BRUSH AND BRUSH...

Finally, Mom showed up.
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10-MX 4

The classic comic by Sam Kieth and William Messner-Loebs is back in this re-mastered edition that collects the first four issues of The Maxx with all-new colors by Ronda Pattison.

IDW